APRIL 2012
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THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

Z CHOICE
ARD WINNERS

285 products reviewed!

HE HIGH COST OF HEALTH
ur members rate the best

LUS SIZE = PLUS PRICE

ESTS
-presso machines
shwashers
ens
s heaters
offee roasters
inders
od docks
ts
rollers

Supermarket standover

Why your favourite products are disappearing

Putting the 'super' back in supermarkets

We're pushing for big changes in the supermarket sector

My first experience as a consumer in Australia was walking into a Woolworths store to buy some groceries. My overwhelming memory is that it was more expensive than high-end UK store Harrods but had the look and feel of a bargain basement. I subsequently found out it was one of Woolworths' flagship stores and the prices were pretty normal for Australia.

In my early interviews with Australian media I mentioned these observations, and what followed was a bruising media and campaigning battle between CHOICE and the Coles and Woolworths duopoly. It's still my greatest disappointment that we haven't affected as much change as I would have liked to see in the grocery market, unlike the change we're spearheading in other areas.

An investigation in this month's magazine (page 27) looks at the rise of supermarket home brands and how this is reducing choice for consumers, while also squeezing the lifeblood out of producers. Over the next few months we'll be shining a spotlight on other aspects of the Coles/Woolies duopoly and the impact this has on us all.

We're looking at issues that affect producers as well as consumers, because there's a good deal of commonality between the two. Consumers want to pay a fair price, but also want farmers and producers to be given a fair deal. Consumers have favourite brands, but many have been sidelined to shelves with little visibility, and eventually replaced by home brands that look remarkably similar.

Aside from New Zealand, nowhere else in the world is the supermarket sector as concentrated as in Australia – here, Coles and Woolworths have 71% of the market. There's no doubt in my mind that the ever-increasing profitability of the duopoly is at the expense of consumers at one end and producers at the other.

The good news is that the ACCC seems to have found its voice on these matters under new chair Rod Sims, and we'll be talking to him about tackling some of these systemic issues within the grocery business. We are also appealing to more producers to step forward and go on the record about some of the abuses in the market.

We find more and more home brands look uncannily like the real deal

Having spoken to many apple growers in NSW, I know it takes a lot of guts to speak out for fear of retribution from the duopoly – a further sign, if one was needed, of the need for change.

As always we'd like consumers to play their part. So if one of your favourite products has disappeared from the shelves, please let us know at investigation@choice.com.au and join our campaigns at choice.com.au/campaigns.

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Phone: 1800 266 786
Email: nick@choice.com.au
Twitter: @nickstacetweets

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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PEFC
Promoting Sustainable Forest Management
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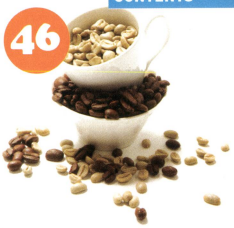

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Rachel Clemons finds out how kids' juice drinks stack up on page 42

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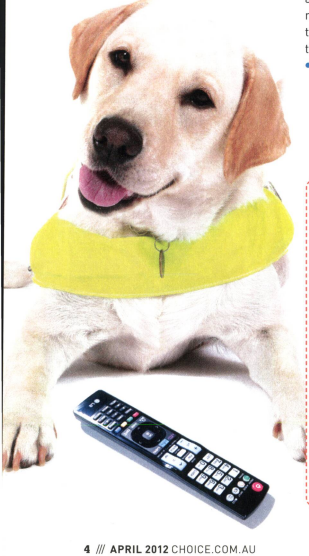
Accessible TV

The ABC will launch a trial in the coming months to help improve access to electronic media for visually impaired people.

Voice description will be made available for a selection of drama, documentary and other content for 14 hours each week. It is hoped the trial, the first of its kind in Australia, will generate a greater understanding of the technical and consumer issues associated with the creation and delivery of audio narrative services.

ACCAN disability policy adviser, Wayne Hawkins, says blind and vision-impaired Australians will be delighted to no longer miss out on prime-time TV action. **ELISE DALLEY**



"The minimal recommended amount averages out to less than an hour of exercise a day"

Get moving

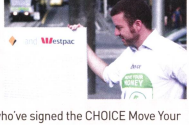
The American College of Sports Medicine has released its latest recommendations for the type and amount of exercise required to maintain adult fitness. Based on a thorough review of the latest science, the recommendations are:

- **Aerobic training** Five days a week of moderate-intensity exercise – 30-60 min a day, at least 150 min a week, or three days a week of vigorous-intensity exercise, 20-60 min a day, at least 75 min a week.
- **Resistance training** Two to three days a week (20-30 min sessions).
- **Flexibility training** (stretching) Two to three days a week (10-20 min sessions).
- **Functional fitness** such as yoga for agility and body control – two to three days a week, 20-30 min a day.

While this may look like a lot, the minimal recommended amount averages out to less than an hour of exercise a day.

KARINA BRAY

Money on the move



To celebrate World Consumer Rights Day on March 15, CHOICE has delivered a giant farewell card on behalf of thousands of Australians to the big four banks in Melbourne's Bourke St Mall. The card contained the names of 4300 people who've signed the CHOICE Move Your Money petition, pledging to look for a better deal beyond the big four banks.

In our research, we've found you can save an average of $2773 on a $300,000 home loan or $449 on a $3000 credit card debt, or gain an extra $328 a year more on a $5000 deposit simply by switching. CHOICE has created a switching kit with advice on transaction accounts, home loans, credit cards and savings accounts, which is available to download at choice.com.au/switchingkit. And to find out how to Move Your Money, visit choice.com.au/moveyourmoney.

ELIZABETH McNESS

Looking for the best banking deal? Our Compare, Ditch and Switch site makes it easy – log on to choice.com.au/CDS

BREAKING NEWS

Fighting on

Unibic, the Melbourne factory that manufactures the Australian Anzac brand biscuits, has been saved from closure by a consortium of investors after going into voluntary administration last month. As well as rescuing this iconic household Australian biscuit brand, 170 jobs were saved at the factory.

For more on disappearing Australian brands, see our supermarket investigation on page 22.

Counting kJs

The NSW Food Authority has launched a campaign to help improve consumers' knowledge of kilojoules following the state's introduction of mandatory fast food kilojoule labelling.

The focus of the campaign is the 8700.com.au website, which takes as its starting point the number of kilojoules consumed by the average adult – 8700kJ – and provides tools to help consumers find their own "ideal figure" based on gender, age and level of activity.

Un-Australian

The ACCC has fined the distributor of Double D brand eucalyptus oil for falsely labelling imported eucalyptus oil as made in Australia. The regulator believes that "during much of 2011 the oil was actually imported from China and southern Africa".

FIRST LOOK

The hero shot

The HD Hero2 pocket-sized camera/camcorder is designed to capture HD video in extreme conditions. When in its plastic housing it can take some serious punishment – it can also take extremes in temperature, with a battery-warmer to keep you shooting in cold climates.

The camera itself is a simple block with three buttons, three connections and a fixed-focus lens with the ability to capture video at 170°- and 127°-wide angle in 1080p resolution and a narrow 90° field of view at 720p. It can also capture 11 megapixel still images and play both video and audio on a TV using a mini-HDMI connection. An optional LCD viewer is very useful for framing a shot, but if you plan on doing anything outrageous, we recommend shooting without the LCD viewer attached.

Its controls are simple yet frustrating. Various menu items such as video, playback and still camera are available as a button selection, but if you miss one selection you need to cycle through all the choices to get back to the appropriate menu.

Our testers, including a group of teens hell-bent on making a funniest home video, soon realised that the suction bracket that comes with the motor kit needs a smooth surface or it falls off and tumbles along the road. However, the mishap did illustrate the unit's durability when placed in the clear plastic mount. Another interesting feature on offer is the ability to capture 60 or 120 frames per second, allowing you to create atmospheric slow-motion video of a hair-raising stunt.

CHOICE VERDICT

It's not the easiest camera to use, nor is it cheap once all the extras are added on, but it's a lot of fun to use and limited only by your willingness to put yourself in crazy situations.

DENIS GALLAGHER

HD HERO2
$369 (MOTORSPORTS EDITION)
GOPRO.COM

★★★★½

GUIDEDOG UK IMAGES

Goal kickers

The ACCC will take full advantage of its new powers in enforcing consumer law over the next year, according to chairman Rod Sims.

The regulator's agenda for 2012 includes the activities of companies operating in concentrated markets, vulnerable consumers and confusion about telco products and services.

"Australia has many concentrated markets ... Our priority in 2012 will be to determine whether or not there are breaches in these important sectors," says Sims. Examples of concentrated markets include fuel and supermarkets.

Door-to-door salespeople and those exploiting the geographic isolation of indigenous Australians are also a top priority. **BRENDAN MAYS**

Better off?

Are we better off now than our parents or grandparents? It's a question CommSec has attempted to answer with its 30/40/50 Project. Using old copies of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and adjusting for inflation and wages, the research has thrown up some interesting measures. In 1982, a 53cm TV was selling for today's equivalent of $2162. A return trip to Europe in 1972 cost $5828 in today's money, while 1962's standard Holden was $28,020. But the starkest difference between today and yesteryear is the cost of land. In 1962, a block in Penrith cost the equivalent of $15,060 – with the added allure of being "45 minutes by electric train" to Sydney. **ELIZABETH McNESS**

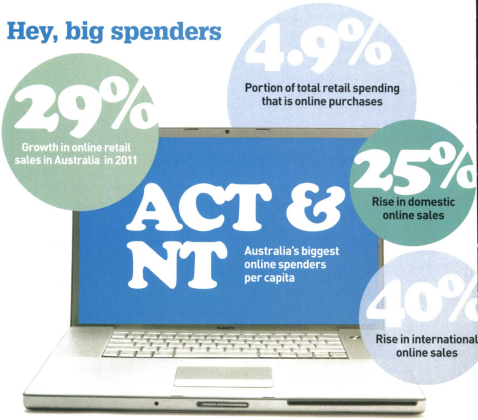
The raw facts on raw milk

Raw milk and milk products are linked with a rate of disease outbreak 150 times that caused by pasteurised milk, according to a study by the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The study also found that the raw milk product outbreaks led to more severe illnesses, and disproportionately affected people aged less than 20.

"While some people believe raw milk has more health benefits than pasteurised milk, this study shows that raw milk has great risks, especially for children, who experience more severe illnesses if sick," says study co-author Barbara Mahon.

An assessment of safety systems for raw milk products in Australia is under review by our food regulator, FSANZ, which in August last year recommended that non-pasteurised hard or very hard cooked curd cheeses be permitted. **RACHEL CLEMONS**

Hey, big spenders



Confusion for sale

Flood-affected Queenslanders aren't the only ones feeling perplexed about their insurance policies. Astonishingly, the Insurance Ombudsman has declared many of those selling insurance products are themselves confused by what they're selling. "If the trained salespeople are confused as to what the cover offers then how do you expect a consumer to understand?" asks Insurance Ombudsman, John Price. The Financial Ombudsman Service has a dedicated line for flood-affected consumers who feel they've been unjustly treated by their insurer. Contact FOS on 1800 377 444 or visit fos.org.au. **DAN BLOOM**

Global expansion

Almost half the world is trying to lose weight, according to a recent online Nielsen survey of 25,000 consumers in 56 countries. One in seven also said they are cutting down on fats.

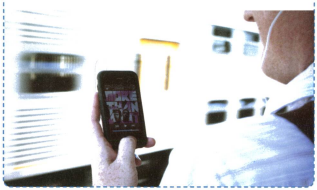
And the food issues don't stop there. Six out of 10 said it was tough to figure out nutritional labels on food packages, while more than two-thirds indicated they either never or only sometimes trust nutritional claims. See choice.com.au/foodlabelling for more. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

Headphone hurt

A university study examining the link between headphone use and pedestrian injury and death caused by vehicles in the US has found 116 reports of death or injury of pedestrians wearing headphones between 2004 and 2011.

The majority of victims were males under 30 and more than half of the incidents involved trains (55%). In many cases there was a warning sound such as a horn before the accident.

While the dangers of being distracted by a mobile phone while driving are well known, the study shows that headphone use is also an important consideration for pedestrian safety. **BRENDAN MAYS**



Power imbalance

Energy distributors in Victoria have a trump card when it comes to pushing through rate hikes. Earlier this year the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) ruled limits should be placed on the amount of costs distributors can pass on to households, but the distributors appealed the ruling to the Australian Competition Tribunal and the price control was thrown out.

According to the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre, distribution costs can add up to 40% to an energy bill. "Distributors can challenge the AER's pricing guidelines with minimal risk that the outcome will see them worse off, because the system allows distributors to only challenge the parts of an AER decision they think they can win," says Janine Rayner from the Consumer Action Law Centre. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

SOURCE: NielsenONLINE RETAIL SALES INDEX | IMAGE: ISTOCKPHOTO

Trimming the fat

Stamping out dodgy health and nutrition claims on food products is one step closer, with food regulator FSANZ calling for submissions on a draft health claims standard.

The proposed standard would introduce rules to govern use of such claims and require all products with health claims – where an attribute of the product is linked to a health outcome – to meet an overall level of healthiness based on a nutrient profile score.

In a big win for consumers, FSANZ has also proposed tighter regulation of "fat-free" claims. CHOICE's Shame the Claim campaign found numerous dodgy fat-free claims, and while we'd like all claims to be subject to greater scrutiny, this is a great start.

ANGELA McDOUGALL

Life insurance just super

Looking into life insurance? It pays to check what your super fund offers. According to Rice Warner Actuaries, for a $1 million life insurance policy a 30-year-old male non-smoking office worker would pay on average $380 per year through an industry super fund, or $580 per year for a standalone policy. Another advantage of taking out life insurance through your fund is that you can pay for it with your pre-tax income. **UTA MIHM**

A waste of energy

A recent survey of Victorian consumers' experiences with door-to-door energy sales revealed that pressure sales, misleading and deceptive tactics and negative experiences are rampant.

The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre has recommended better enforcement of the Australian Consumer Law and a curtailing of "this invasive practice in favour of more consumer-driven sales approaches". Of the 327 survey respondents, 81% had been approached by door-to-door salespeople. Of those, 24% revealed that the salesperson failed to leave when asked, 16% said they had been told they "had to change energy company", and 26% said the salesperson was initially dishonest about their reason for knocking. Only eight per cent of respondents said the overall experience with the salesperson was very positive or somewhat positive, while 73% described the experience as somewhat or very negative.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Kicking the can

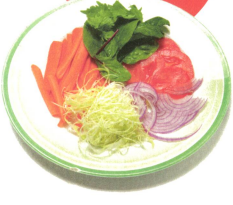
Researchers comparing levels of obesity in NSW schoolchildren before and after a 2007 ban of sugar-sweetened drink sales in government schools found the prevalence of obesity decreased from 6.2% to 5.8%.

Before the ban, about half of school-aged kids reported drinking 250mL or more of soft drink per day, but less than 15% did in 2010. Data analysis showed that kids who had five or more cups of soft drink a week were 1.4 times more likely to be obese than those who drank less. **KARINA BRAY**

61% of Australian adults were overweight or obese in 2007-08

90% did not eat enough vegetables and 50% did not eat enough fruit

72% did not get enough exercise



➤I SAY

Card games

Last year I was given a Westfield gift card. I was happy because when it comes to shopping I'm a world champion, but I quickly learned that even world champion shoppers can fall foul of ridiculous gift card restrictions.

First stop, Westfield. In a boutique I find a wallet I like and attempt to use my gift card. "Sorry," says the sales assistant, "we don't accept Westfield cards." Confused, I head to Myer (inside Westfield) where I find a dress I'm a little bit in love with. Again the sales assistant shakes their head. "We don't accept Westfield cards in Myer." Accepting defeat I head home, aware the expiry date on my card is ticking away like a time bomb.

I hop on the Westfield website and again I'm foiled. Turns out you can't use Westfield gift cards on the Westfield website. Then I spy some clothes I like at Country Road online. I'm guessing they won't accept my Westfield card either but figure they could send the clothes I want to a Westfield store so I can buy them there. After all, they're selling clothes, I want to buy them.

Nope. Country Road don't transfer stock between online and bricks-and-mortar stores. The sales assistant keeps looking and finally locates one of the pieces I want in their concession store in Myer. Yep, the very same Myer that doesn't accept Westfield gift cards and no, they can't transfer it to a store that does. Unbeaten, my shop assistant suggests I buy a Country Road gift card with my Westfield gift card so I can shop online. She checks with her manager, but once again it's a no, you can't buy a gift voucher with a gift voucher. When I ask why, no-one can tell me.

> "Even world champion shoppers can fall foul of ridiculous gift card restrictions"

Wondering exactly what I *can* do with this expensive piece of plastic, I finally crack and send an email to Country Road with my tale of woe. Thankfully someone responds with a solution. Relieved to be rid of my cursed card, I thank heavens someone finally saw sense, because whoever dreamed up the gift cards rules certainly doesn't.

KATE BROWNE

Y not spend?

Gen Y shoppers appear to be defying the GFC and spending up on high-end luxury items.

According to American Express, US consumers aged 18-29 increased spending on premium fashion brands by 33% in 2011. And research by IBM estimates men's apparel sales rose by more than eight per cent in 2011 and will continue to rise, with department stores that have strong online presences proving popular internationally. **SAM BUTLER**

Hunger Buster busted

The TGA recently investigated claims behind Chika Health's Supprexxa Hunger Buster, a kit containing "weight loss" spray and tablets we named and shamed in *CHOICE* Dec 2011/Jan 2012.

After analysing evidence provided by Chika Health, TGA scientific experts determined that the evidence does not support the claims. As a result the TGA has informed the company it's proposing to cancel the products from the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods. A shame really – Supprexxa was a shoo-in for a Shonky! KARINA BRAY

Member spotlight

CHOICE member and small business owner Jad Bajjali lives with his wife Diane and their 17 year old Shih tzu Benji in Blackwood, SA. Jad has two grown-up sons, Matthew and Steven, who have (thankfully!) left home.

Why did you join CHOICE?
I believe CHOICE is a unique service offering unbiased opinions and test reports and truly works for the consumer and the public interests. Joining was an easy decision as without membership, CHOICE and the service it offers won't exist.

What section/s of *CHOICE* do you read first?
It may sound funny, and maybe it's a guy thing, but I always read the back page (Hard Word) first as it invariably gives me a laugh and proves the marketers have either no idea of reality or at best no attention to detail.

Have you made any CHOICE recommended purchases?
I've purchased CHOICE recommended products many times and in general have not been disappointed. I use it as my buying guide and while I generally stay with the top pick or best buy, if the second choice is heavily discounted I may be tempted to buy that product. I recall many years ago a CHOICE recommended toaster (Kambrook Cool Touch) that still gives us great toast every morning and has outlasted many of our friends' toasters. It has well and truly repaid the cost of our membership in the savings we've made not having to replace toasters.

What CHOICE campaigns have you found to be most important to you?
I believe the Better Banking campaign has contributed to some greater transparency and improvement of customer service in the banking industry. As consumers, we need to keep the pressure on the banks to ensure they meet our needs, not just those of their executives and shareholders.

What product/s would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?
I think given the onslaught of email marketing businesses such as Spreets, Our Deal etc. a report investigating the value, validity and integrity of such offers (as well as the pitfalls) would be good. And tablet computer reviews need to be kept up as this is a market segment that is changing weekly.

To become our next Member in the Spotlight, email us at inthespotlight@choice.com.au.

CHOICE is the perfect gift

See page 62 for a special Mother's Day subscription offer.

Lab tours

Curious about how CHOICE tests hundreds of products every year? Come along to one of our lab tours in Marrickville, Sydney. Upcoming tours will be held at 10.30am on Thursday 12 April, Wednesday 16 May and Thursday 14 June. Go to choice.com.au/about-us/labtours for more or email us at labtours@choice.com.au to make a booking. Numbers are limited.

Can you help?

Have you had a bad experience with a ticketing agency when buying tickets for a show, concert or sporting event? Let us know about it by emailing **talkback@choice.com.au.**

You can also join us on Facebook and Twitter.

FIRST LOOK

Screen resolution for the iPad2 (top) and new iPad (bottom)

Resolution revolution

As expected, the screen on Apple's third-generation tablet computer is superb. The iPad packs 2048x1536 pixels into its 9.7" screen, giving it a million more pixels than a 1080p HD TV screen. And, Apple says, it has 44% greater colour saturation.

The new iPad also has a faster processor with quad-core graphics, which it needs to drive all those extra pixels without the whole unit slowing down. These extra power demands have led to Apple increasing the battery to almost double the capacity of the iPad 2 just to maintain the same claimed 10-hour life of its predecessor.

The upgraded rear camera uses the five-piece lens system used on the iPhone 4S. There's also built-in face detection for still pictures and image stabilisation for video.

The new iPad brings with it the iOS 5.1 update, and Apple has upgraded its own iWork apps. One thing noticeably missing from the iPad is Siri, Apple's personal digital assistant that debuted on the iPhone 4S. However, the iPad does have the voice dictation feature of the 4S, which recognises and translates speech in any app that offers data entry via keyboard.

The other noticeable absence is 4G LTE mobile networking. In Australia, our only commercially available 4G LTE network is Telstra's new offering, which operates on the 1800MHz frequency. Apple's arch-rival Samsung has queried whether the iPad should even be marketed in Australia as a 4G device when there's no 4G network here to support it. The iPad can still access the fastest 3G networks here, including DC-HSDPA and HSDPA+. All models have 802.11n local Wi-Fi capability as standard.

CHOICE VERDICT

If you're considering buying a tablet computer, don't make a decision without comparing the new iPad with the still available but discounted iPad 2, which now starts at $429.

If you have the first model iPad and consider yourself a heavy user, it may be time to trade up. If you have an iPad 2 already, you probably won't want to upgrade, especially since it can also use the updated iOS 5.1 and apps. Unless, of course, you simply fall in love with that gorgeous screen.

STEVE DUNCOMBE

APPLE iPAD (LATEST RELEASE)
$539 – $899
APPLE.COM.AU
★★★★½

Insurer churn

The results of a survey by Ernst & Young of 24,000 insurance customers across 23 countries, including more than 1000 in Australia, paints a picture of customer dissatisfaction on a global scale.

"Australian consumers are taking a much more proactive approach to educating themselves about their insurance needs and product options, and there is frustration with the industry's apparent complexity," says Andrew Taggart, Ernst & Young's customer advisory leader for insurance in Australia. More than half of the Australians surveyed take a dim view of the industry, the firm says, while more than 80% who had switched insurance providers in the past five years felt their previous insurer had made little or no effort to retain their business. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

More 'i's than yous

402,609
Number of iPhones sold each day in the last three months of 2011

367,322
Number of babies born every day, according to the United Nations

VOLKSWAGEN

CHOICE campaigns and media man bids farewell

I've been asked to sum up my five years at CHOICE in 500 words, but I can do it in two: thank you.

Thank you to the members who make this organisation possible, and to the consumers who make up our economy. You are vital and central, not just to CHOICE but to every government, every producer, every retailer and hundreds of thousands of businesses. Sometimes both we, and they, forget this salient fact, and part of my job has been to be a constant reminder of it.

Thank you for the rare privilege of allowing me to amplify the consumer voice via the media, in front of public inquiries, before decision makers and against vested interests who have a different understanding of the words consumer and competition. Along the way I've learned much – on a technical level, I've learned about everything from the complex conundrums of financial advice and the labelling dilemmas around nanotechnology to the best ways to convey the thermal efficiency of fridges.

But the greatest insight has been into human nature and basic economics. We humans may disagree about much, but wherever we are, rich or poor, we're united by a fundamental desire to trade or exchange and get a fair or even better deal. As consumers we tend to be amateurs who act alone, whereas producers are professionals who work together. It's this basic power imbalance that consumer groups such as CHOICE seek to redress.

There have been many highlights on this journey. The Shonky Awards is always a challenge as expectations grow each year, but using humour to unmask the dodgy, dubious and deceitful has its own rewards. Working with other consumer groups around the world underlines the universal nature of our work. The lunchbox challenge we developed in 2007, which saw Bondi Primary School children struggling to pick five healthy food items from a distracting range of goodies, has since been adapted globally.

I'll always value the great support from the media helping us relay our message. The calls came at any time of the day or night on many subjects, which could test my capacity. The most inventive was a radio interview from Colombia at 4am to talk in Spanish about our test on the power-hungry Xbox game consoles.

Thank you to the dedicated and talented people at CHOICE who do the hard work to provide the ammunition, from product testing to policy development, that we can fire to advance the consumer cause.

I may be moving on from this role... but I intend to remain active around consumer issues

Above all, thanks to the many people from all walks of life I've been lucky enough to meet, address at public events and listen to. Your advice, stories and above all encouragement have been much appreciated.

I may be moving on from this role, leaving it in capable hands, but I intend to remain active around consumer issues. I arrived five years ago as a journalist. I leave CHOICE infinitely richer as a consumer advocate and I have much to thank you all for that.

CHRISTOPHER ZINN

Made in Australia?

Test your knowledge – take the quiz at choice.com.au/coolquiz

CoOl quiz results

A total of 2231 people have taken CHOICE's Australia Day Food Labelling Quiz, and the results confirm there is a lot of confusion about country of origin food labelling. Just 33% of respondents passed the test, scoring three or more out of five.

The poorest result was for the question on "Made in Australia from local and imported ingredients", with more than 74% believing this claim means that 50% or more of the processing has been done in Australia.

These results reinforce the need for a reform of country of origin labelling laws so that consumers are properly informed about where their food comes from. Take the quiz at choice.com.au/coolquiz.

ANGELA McDOUGALL

Shoddy goods on notice

Whitegoods and electrical and gas products topped the list of complaints to NSW Fair Trading in 2011, making up 2611 of more than 42,500 for the year. Shoddy goods left consumers almost $1bn out of pocket in total as some retailers "shirked their obligations and left consumers to sort out the problem on their own and at their own expense," said Fair Trading Minister Anthony Roberts.

A national project is currently under way involving NSW Fair Trading, other state and territory regulators and the ACCC. The regulators will be checking that whitegoods and electronics retailers are complying with consumer guarantee requirements under the new Australian Consumer Law launched last year.

The second-highest complaint category to NSW Fair Trading last year was home building, including renovations and additions.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Getting a rise

Those with private health insurance will pay more from 1 April this year, with premiums increasing by an average of 5.06%. Increases vary by fund and policy, and the smallest rise was 2.19% by Mildura District Health Fund, while the largest was 7.85% by CUA Health. Means testing for health insurance rebates and higher Medicare Levy Surcharges kick in from 1 July 2012. CHOICE is already updating our Best Buys, to be published in our July issue.

To find out how means testing and higher surcharges will affect you, see our story on page 28.

UTA MIHM

All clear?

Medical regulator the TGA lacks transparency, according to researchers at the University of Sydney who analysed data released by the TGA over the past 11 years.

The study looked into the frequency, characteristics and outcomes of reports of possible harms related to medical devices using publicly available data. CHOICE recently looked into this issue (see *CHOICE*, March 2012 or log on to choice.com.au/joint).

"There were several times during the January 2000 to December 2011 period covered by the study where data on medical device incidents was unavailable," says Dr Richard McGee, lead author of the study. "This lack of transparency has the potential to undermine confidence in the TGA."

The study also concludes that although medical device incidents were increasing, recalls were not.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Email us at yoursay@choice.com.au or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

The gift of a money trap

I recently agreed to a new $78 per month phone plan with Telstra, and a few days after signing up, I received a T-Box in the mail. I was never told I would be sent this, so I rang Telstra and asked if there were any costs associated with it. I was told there'd be a one-off $25 charge on my first account.

Several days later I received a contract in the mail that included the $39.95 cost of the T-Box, plus $9.95 postage and handling and an $11 monthly usage fee. After ringing Telstra to complain, I was told to return the T-Box in a reply paid envelope provided by them.

Telstra has since overcharged me on two additional occasions. When I complained about this I was told it can take three months for the account to register that the T-Box was returned. As I did not request this in the first place, I don't think I should have to dissect every bill and spend time on the phone sorting it out. Can you provide any advice?

Veronica & Denis O'Mara, Landsborough, Qld

CHOICE says *Despite investigations and closer oversight by the regulator, the telco industry continues to be one of the main sources of consumer complaints. We recommend you send your complaint to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (tio.com.au) along with an official complaint to Telstra. The specificity and solid documentation of your complaint may lead to some form of compensation.*

LETTER OF THE MONTH

A tale about a sale

Looking around for a saw last year, I found a particular type of Bosch model at Bunnings Belconnen for $916. The same saw was available for $799 online and the company was willing to freight it directly to me for $50. All up, the online option was $67 less than my local Bunnings, so I decided to test out the Bunnings guarantee that it will beat any advertised price on a stocked item by 10%.

Despite fulfilling this guarantee for me in the past, Bunnings was not forthcoming with its promise. It would only agree to match the $799 online offer, rather than better it by 10%. Armed with advice from the Office of Regulatory Services that told me I should be eligible for a 10% discount on the $799 price, I wrote a letter to the store manager at Bunnings, who agreed to the discount – a total saving of almost $200 off their original shelf price.

Perhaps Bunnings should amend their advertising to read: "We guarantee to beat any advertised price on a stocked item by 10%, when we choose to do so."

Geoff Hoyle, Canberra, ACT

CHOICE SAYS *Since the introduction of the Australian Consumer Law at the beginning of 2011, consumers are now protected by a set of 12 guarantees. This law says consumers have the right to receive accurate and truthful messages about goods they wish to purchase.*

Businesses must not engage in conduct that is misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive. Where the overall impression of an advertisement creates a misleading impression in your mind, that conduct is likely to breach the law. This provision is very broad and one the ACCC and state fair trading offices deal with on a daily basis.

Next time, if you believe you've been misled, make this known to the store manager. If they're not in a position to correct the behaviour, contact your local fair trading office.

ISTOCK PHOTO

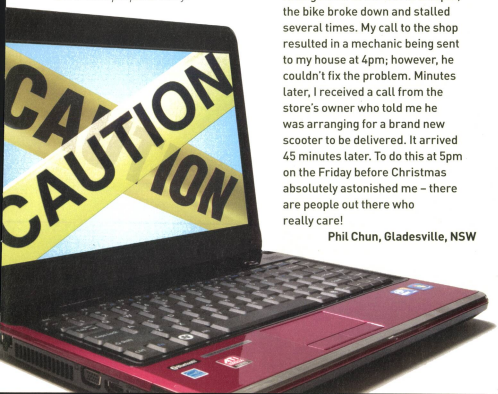
Phishing trip

I received an unsolicited phone call from a self-described computer representative with advice on how to fix a "polymorphic virus" that she said had infected my computer, although she was unable to define what such a virus is. She became very bossy and demanded I turn my computer on but wouldn't provide a business name when asked. I wonder if I've been the intended victim of a scam? Can you advise on which authority I should approach?

Lee Nelson, Eltham North, Vic

CHOICE says *This sounds like a phishing scam that's been making the rounds, and one we recently reported on (see* CHOICE, *March 2012). There are a few variations, but generally the scammer asks the victims to run a program already on their computer (Windows Event Viewer is one example) that allows the scammer to take control remotely. After the nonexistent problem is "fixed", the crooks ask for credit card details or other payment. Depending on the type of scam, they may also be able to access your security details.*

State fair trading or consumer affairs agencies such as Consumer Affairs Victoria have issued warnings about this and other computer repair scams and are the people to notify.



Thumbs

A big thumbs up to DeLonghi for its generosity and excellent customer service. Upon opening my Kenwood Tri-blade Stick Blender in February, I realised three parts were missing, including the whisk attachment. DeLonghi (which owns Kenwood) promptly answered my call to its customer line, and after leaving my details a manager returned my call that afternoon. DeLonghi agreed to send me a brand new blender and didn't expect me to post the faulty product back as I live in remote central-west Queensland. My faith has been restored, at least in one company.

Chris Coles, Isisford, Qld

On 23 December last year I picked up a new motor scooter for my wife at Scooteria Stanmore. Riding home in the wet at 3.30pm, the bike broke down and stalled several times. My call to the shop resulted in a mechanic being sent to my house at 4pm; however, he couldn't fix the problem. Minutes later, I received a call from the store's owner who told me he was arranging for a brand new scooter to be delivered. It arrived 45 minutes later. To do this at 5pm on the Friday before Christmas absolutely astonished me – there are people out there who really care!

Phil Chun, Gladesville, NSW

I've been a customer of the service centre at Sydney City Toyota at Glebe for about 14 years. During this time the service team has kept my 1990 Corolla ticking over like a high-precision racing car. In February this year I took it in to check on an electrical burning smell that was occurring when the headlights were switched on. The service team did a thorough check, well beyond my expectations, and found nothing to explain the smell. When I collected my car, they told me that because I was a good customer, the work had been done free of charge. I would've expected this service in a small country town, not from a large corporation in Sydney.

Liz Hayes, Darlington, NSW

The envelope, please

Who are the winners of this year's CHOICE Awards? Our experts hand out bouquets to the worthy recipients

The third annual CHOICE Awards is our chance to celebrate the people, products, services and brands that improve the lives of consumers every day. Contrasting with our infamous Shonkys, these awards shine a spotlight on innovation, exemplary customer service and product reliability – not to mention fearless advocacy in the case of our Consumer Champion (see opposite) – in a range of areas close to our hearts.

We hope you enjoy the show!

And the CHOICE Award for Best Insurer – Home, Contents and Car goes to...

Suncorp

The starting point for this award was the views of 2200 members canvassed via our insurance satisfaction survey. We quickly got the message that Suncorp customers are among the most satisfied when it comes to home and contents and car insurance products.

Suncorp has been a strong performer year-on-year in our regular reviews, and it's a provider we singled out as an exception to our 2011 Shonky for the industry.

We based this award on what we think good insurance products should deliver – especially in light of recent developments. For those in harm's way in 2011 and more recently, Suncorp's Classic and Platinum home and contents policies offered the kind of protection that could mean the difference between recovery and financial catastrophe.

For home and contents insurance, we looked for the availability of substantial extra cover above sum insured, unlimited accidental damage cover and a high limit for valuables, as well as including flood cover without limitations, exclusions or a special excess.

For car insurance, the benchmarks included total replacement for up to two years after purchase, a workable hire car offer, and, most importantly, a solid policy score in our recent market-wide car insurance survey (*CHOICE* March 2012). Among our finalists, only Suncorp's Comprehensive policy ticked all these boxes. We went back to the satisfaction survey to make the final call. Nine out of 10 Suncorp car insurance customers rated the company's claims handling as very good or excellent. **Andy Kollmorgen**

And the CHOICE Award for Best Travel Money Card goes to...

GE Money 28 Degrees MasterCard

No two prepaid travel money cards are quite alike, but one thing they all have in common is fees (see page 32). Fees are often the deal breaker when it comes to our assessment of financial service products – and that's why our travel money award winner was chosen from the credit card rather than the prepaid card category.

We haven't overlooked the one undeniable advantage of prepaid over credit or debit cards – the ability to lock in exchange rates. But for this award, we concentrated strictly on which product will cost you the least if you use it correctly. Locking in the best exchange rate can save you money, but only if you accurately predict the rate changes. Card fees, on the other hand, are a certainty, so the fee-free 28 Degrees MasterCard came out on top.

We also picked a runner-up from the prepaid products, since some consumers won't want to apply for a credit card or open a new bank account just for one overseas trip. Commonwealth Bank's Travel Money card edged out the others because it meets our money-saving benchmarks: no initial loading, inactivity or closure fees, and the lowest fee for using currencies not loaded on your card of the cards we reviewed. **Andy Kollmorgen**

And the inaugural Tester's CHOICE Award goes to...

Breville Fast Slow Cooker

Having tested cooking appliances for 15 years there are very few small ones I recommend. As well as its cooking performance, I consider how versatile a product is, whether it will take up precious cupboard or bench space, how often it'll be used, whether this method of cooking can be done on a cooktop or oven, and, basically, whether it's really necessary.

The Breville Fast Slow Cooker is a one-pot wonder – it's four appliances in one. You can sear your meat and vegetables in it ready for a long slow cook and have a meal ready when you get home. Or, you can cook comfort foods in a quarter of the usual time. It also steams vegetables and rice, and is so easy to use, with comprehensive instructions and recipes.

This appliance is great for the busy family and costs about $200 – less than buying separate specialised products. And don't forget, these methods of cooking suit cheaper cuts of meats as well as legumes and pulses.

Fiona Mair, CHOICE home economist

And the CHOICE Award for Consumer Champion goes to...

Dr Ken Harvey

Over his career, and then in retirement, Dr Ken Harvey has campaigned on behalf of consumers to improve the regulations for the use and promotion of therapeutic goods.

While working at Royal Melbourne Hospital in the 1970s, Ken became concerned about the inappropriate prescribing of antibiotics, and so began his interest in ethical promotion of medicines.

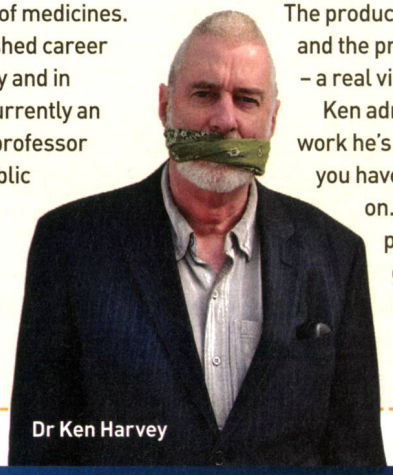
After a distinguished career both internationally and in Australia, Ken is currently an adjunct associate professor in the School of Public Health, La Trobe University.

Elected to the CHOICE Council in 2000, Ken has been awarded life membership of CHOICE for services to the consumer movement and is a member of our Policy Advisory Group.

Ken really put himself on the line when he went up against weight loss company SensaSlim last year. When he lodged a complaint about their ads with the TGA, SensaSlim threatened to sue him unless he retracted his comments. He refused, so they sued. After many months of stressful legal goings-on and great personal expense (though costs were ultimately met by supporters) he won his case.

The product was eventually delisted and the principals prosecuted – a real victory for consumers.

Ken admits that the line of work he's in is "frustrating, but you have to keep on keeping on. Bureaucrats change, politicians change, governments change, but the problems remain the same." **Karina Bray**



Dr Ken Harvey

MAL VICKERS

And the CHOICE Award for Best Vacuum Cleaner Brand goes to...

Miele

CHOICE has been testing vacuum cleaners for many years. We assess how well they clean dirt and pet hair from carpet, edges, corners, whether they'll scratch hard floors, how noisy they are and how easy they are to use.

For this award, we looked at our results from the past three years. Over that time, we've tested more than 100 models and 20 different brands. We looked at those brands of which we'd tested several models to find those that consistently perform well. We compared their average overall scores and how often we have recommended models from each brand. We also looked for those brands that not only perform well when new, but continue to perform well year after year in the home.

Electrolux, Bosch and Dyson all deserve a tip of the hat here, but Miele really stood out. Of the 12 Miele vacuum cleaners we've tested in the past three years, we've recommended 10 to buy. The brand also tops our reliability survey, making Miele a very worthy winner.

Chris Barnes

And the CHOICE Award for Best Fridge Brand goes to...

Fisher & Paykel

We felt it was time to recognise that, when it comes to fridges, Fisher & Paykel consistently delivers a good product. This award was based on the past two years of CHOICE fridge testing across many brands and models. It is a combination of the average overall score of the tested models, ratio of recommended to tested models and results from our annual reliability survey – which had more than 11,000 respondents this year (see page 34).

Our test results account for a range of expectations that members have when buying a fridge, including maintaining steady temperatures, keeping those even throughout compartments, offering a good range of temperature options and having optimum temperatures on their recommended or factory setting. You also expect fridges to stay cool in summer and winter, be inexpensive to run and quiet. Many Fisher & Paykel models tick all these boxes and so deserve the bouquet.

Matthew Steen

And the Game Changer CHOICE Award goes to...

The car share industry

Car share schemes, which allow people who need occasional (or regular) access to a vehicle to hire one locally at a reasonable price and with solid insurance, have been around for a few years. But with an expanding fleet, deals with councils that have seen street parking allocated to car share vehicles and more and more car share pods being installed in apartment developments, the schemes are making a real difference in many people's lives.

Most schemes cover the cost of car ownership such as registration and maintenance, and often throw in a certain number of kilometres and petrol for free. Cars can be taken out for as little as one hour, so you need only pay for what you use. Car sharing is also a viable alternative to renting a vehicle from a hire car company, which comes with its own problems (see *CHOICE*, May 2011, or choice.com.au/carhire). Even given the monthly fees charged by car share schemes, rates are in most cases better and insurance contracts have fewer exclusions. Standard and reduced excesses also cost less.

We feel GoGet is the best car sharer, with a wide range of vehicles, pet-friendly policy and simple insurance contract that's similar to a regular comprehensive policy – with minimal exclusions. Not all car share schemes are created equal, so check any contract carefully before signing up. For recognising a gap in the market and filling it in a consumer and environmentally friendly fashion, the CHOICE Game Changer Award goes to car share schemes. **Zoya Sheftalovich**

Curves ahead

Australian bodies are getting bigger, but is the clothing industry keeping up? **Kate Browne** finds out why not

It's no secret that the Australian retail industry is hurting. In the land of the never-ending sale, shop closures and the creaks of collective belt-tightening, it's not a great time to be selling anything – particularly clothing.

But picture an entire segment of the market that is crying out for product, demanding more choice of items, more fashionable designs and better-quality merchandise. In this environment you'd assume this group would have their every need catered to by retailers. But when it comes to clothing, this just isn't the case.

While plenty of Australian women are a size 14 or larger, this isn't apparent when you walk into the average bricks-and-mortar retail store. A casual browse of the racks of available clothes reveals a size range that usually starts at a size six or eight and comes crashing to a halt at size 14, with the occasional sighting of a rare size 16.

As a result, for larger women – and to a lesser degree, larger men (see page 20) – shopping for clothes can be a nightmare.

Cashed up but nowhere to buy

Stylist Sarah Donges of the Sydney/Melbourne-based business The Beauty

WHAT SIZE ARE WE?

Research from the US reveals the sedentary Western body may be changing shape, with waists thickening in both sexes. And, thanks to multiculturalism, there is a wider range of body shapes in Australia.

But despite these studies and abundant anecdotal evidence, there is still no definitive data to show just what kind of shape we are in today. As a result there is no Australian industry standard for adult clothing sizes, so manufacturers are free to choose their own size specifications.

The most recent Australian clothing standard for adult men and women was withdrawn in 2007 because it was no longer onsidered relevant. Established in 1959, it was based on data from a 1926 study of women conducted by underwear manufacturer Berlei as well as some US Department of Commerce standards.

Tutor sees many clients who have money to spend but don't fit what those in the fashion industry deign a standard size. "As soon as I have a (female) client over a size 16 it's a struggle, there's only a few retailers that go up to 18. After that you have to go into specialty stores – if I have a client who is corporate and needs decent work clothes there's really one or two places to go, and they're expensive."

And it doesn't matter whether you have money to burn or not, says Tracey Porter, former editor of Australian fashion industry magazine *Ragtrader*. Porter, a tall, fit size 16, says she could never fit into any of the clothes that crossed her path as editor. In one of her last editorials for the magazine she wrote about her frustrations with the clothing industry and the consumers they continue to ignore. "Despite having curves, money, an interest in fashion and being exposed to literally thousands of fashion brands, I still struggle to find clothes that allow me to be me. And I have no qualms about telling you that you are missing out on a hell of an opportunity with consumers such as myself."

As a "plus size" 14-16, Australian model Robyn Lawley has graced the covers of *Vogue Italia* and French *Elle* but says that in Australia she struggles to find clothes that fit. In a recent interview she talked of wanting to support Australian designers, but says she cannot as few make clothes that fit her. "The fact is, some don't go up to my size… and if they do, it sells out quickly. I think there is a lot of fashion snobbery. It feels like they don't want a size 14 or bigger wearing their clothes."

What our readers say

Rana

"I love fashion, but trying to find clothes that are in style, not shapeless sacks, and affordable is a major challenge."

Caroline

"I go to the shops often and I try on everything I think might be OK in the hope of finding something. There are a couple of designer brand plus-sized clothes that are reliable and true to size, but they are costly so I tend to wait for sales."

What about men?

Most of the industry contacts CHOICE spoke to said that in general, men have it a little easier. Men we spoke to complained about lack of length in trousers and sleeves as well as an overall bad fit, but the differences don't seem to be as extreme as in women's clothes.

Is it just snobbery?

Many of the industry insiders CHOICE spoke to admit that there is some reluctance when it comes to designing for larger body types. "There tends to be an attitude that larger women don't have a sense of style," says Porter. Brisbane designer Sasha Drake, whose eponymous clothing line ranges from eight to 18, says many of the buyers working in retail encourage the preference towards smaller sizes. "Many buyers are very slim and tend to buy accordingly. When I brought out a range of size 14-plus dresses years ago most of the buyers I went to said they loved the garments, and then ordered them in size eight, 10 and 12 – which totally defeated the point."

Ironically, many designers wouldn't even fit into their own designs, say some fashion industry insiders. And Queensland stylist and fashion blogger Nikki Parkinson says at times she feels the fashion industry has "forgotten what it's there to do, which is to sell clothes".

One designer bucking the trend is Leona Edmiston, whose curve-friendly dress range launched a plus-size label catering up to a size 20 last year. General manager Melissa Macalyk says the new line came about as a direct result of customers asking in store or via social media for bigger sizes. "The line has been doing well. There's a real gap in the market for plus size designer fashion but I know there is a reluctance from some designers to go there. They can have big egos and don't want to see something they created not, as they see it, look good on someone."

Plus-size budget?

Stylist Sarah Donges says her larger clients not only have fewer

choices about what they can wear, but also have to pay through the nose for the privilege. "If I have a client who works in a corporate environment and who needs decent work clothes we would need a $3000 budget just for a basic wardrobe. If the same woman were a size 12 I could do it for $1500 easily."

Donges is also critical of the quality of the garments, saying that as a rule of thumb, whatever you can find in a standard size will cost an extra $100 for the same quality in a plus size. On a walk-through of some plus-size stores, we saw one selling a simple size 20 black jersey T-shirt for $179, while another stocked basic poly/cotton mix dresses for more than $300.

However, some in the industry argue that plus-size clothes are more expensive to make. Jo-Ann Kellock from the Council of Textiles and Fashion Industries of Australia tells CHOICE some manufacturers say larger sizes use more fabric and very large sizes require much longer stitching time.

Drake says larger consumers do need to spend money to get a better-fitting garment. "As a generalisation, 14-plus customers do have more body shape issues and can be harder to please. They don't want black and they don't want a tent. I'm a size 14 and as a designer I find the most flattering way to go is to use good fabric and take the time to design a garment that fits and flatters.

Sonya

"The costs are excessive. Instead of paying $39 for a plain white T-shirt, you pay $59. It's the mid-range clothes, which you might team with an outfit, that I resent having to pay so much for."

Nyssa

"If I buy a size 18 from the normal clothing section it doesn't even come close to fitting, yet if I buy a size 18 in the designated 'plus' section it's way too big. And if you go to a store that specialises in larger clothing you can also expect double the price."

Shape up

All the experts we spoke to agree that while the market isn't ideal for plus-sized customers, it is improving. Parkinson says that savvy shoppers (see right) should be able to mix and match budget finds with selected designer labels. "Previously you would have to spend more but there are a few more options now. Avella from Big W is a good quality budget line."

Porter agrees there have been some small improvements, but still shakes her head at a market that is under-catered for. "To overlook a whole market segment is madness, especially in this retail climate. If dollars aren't enough of an incentive, I don't know what is." ■

Shop savvy

Get in early New season designs are released months before you might actually need to wear them. For retailers it's less of a risk to over-order size 10, 12 or 14, so larger sizes sell out faster.

Shop around Don't discount budget brands for basics, or labels for well-designed pieces.

Look online Overseas markets such as the UK and US offer a much wider range of sizes and options.

Be heard If you see a label you like but they don't make your size, let them know. Most labels have a social media presence so you can tell them – and the world – that they're missing out on your customer dollars.

Supermarket sweep

Elise Dalley and **Zoya Sheftalovich** find out why brand-name products are vanishing from the big two's shelves

Coles and Woolworths are enormous corporations, and they're growing bigger, stronger, and more profitable. It's no surprise, given Australians spend about $1.04 billion each week in the big two's supermarkets which have a huge 71% combined share of the grocery market.

The duo recently engaged in a much-publicised price war. Coles claims to have reduced prices on 6000 products, including milk, bread and fresh produce, by an average of 10%. Woolworths also claims to have deflated prices over the past financial year. Yet despite this race to the bottom, the big two both posted healthy profit growth in the same period. So how can shelf prices of thousands of products be coming down while supermarket profits go up?

Squeezed off the shelves

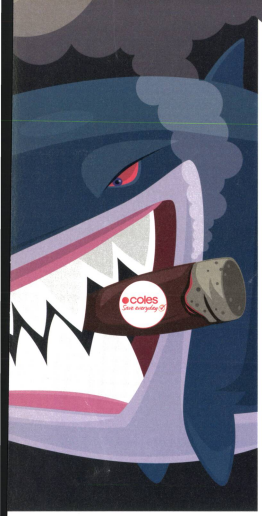
Ever felt that despite the huge range of products available at your local supermarket, you can never find the one brand you're looking for? You're not alone. When we asked CHOICE members to tell us if one of their favourite brands had disappeared from their local supermarket shelf, the response was overwhelming.

"More and more I find I have to drive around town to get the products I'm looking for," said Sarah Weir. Fiona McPhee agreed: "I'm sick of having to chase my favourite products down." Jaynie Edwards wrote: "Pretty much everything I used to buy is getting less shelf space, only to be replaced with the three varieties of shop brand."

Nutshell

- *Private label brands now account for a quarter of supermarket sales.*
- *Small- and large-scale manufacturers' products are disappearing from the shelves as a result of pressure from the big two.*

Jaynie is onto something. A large share of the Australian grocery market is now held by private labels, which accounts for about 25% of annual supermarket sales. IBISWorld predicts that by 2016, about one in three products on the supermarket shelves will bear a private label. Coles and Woolworths now both have a multi-tiered private label offering – bargain basement staples, medium-priced fare and premium/specialist products.



Private label goods can be big profit drivers. Marketing them is cheap since, as John Durkan, Coles merchandise director, points out: "We only have to advertise Coles".

Manufacturing is also streamlined. "We set up individual research and development areas, where we can work with suppliers who supply many people, to fractionalise cost," says Durkan.

But supermarket shelves aren't flexible – there's little room for growth beyond the initial supermarket floor plan. A supermarket's own brand needn't worry about a shelf space squeeze. Where two brands compete for the same shelf, and one brand's parent owns that shelf, it's not hard to tell who the winner will be.

"At the end of the day, the retailer owns the store and can do whatever they want," says Tim Morris, managing director of NZ strategic management consulting and market research firm Coriolis Research. "They can put rival products on the bottom or top shelf, and their own products at eye level. They can manipulate the price. The only controls are competition and the consumer."

Missing in action

The collapse of a number of large-scale manufacturers this year has shone a spotlight on the difficulties faced by those trying to make a living out of supplying groceries in Australia, which usually means supplying Coles and Woolworths. We spoke with several manufacturers and suppliers whose product lines have been deleted by the big two. Many claim this was as a result of supermarket-exerted pressure, including private label expansion. All but one refused to be identified, citing fear of retribution from the supermarkets.

Kevin* is the managing director of one such company. "We were deleted to make room for their own brands. They're reducing the third-, fourth- and fifth-most popular products in product areas."

Woolworths and Coles argue that introducing and expanding private labels has stimulated innovation and competition in many areas of the market. Coles claims only under-performing products are cut. "Where we don't see innovation from branded manufacturers, we'll use the Coles brand to innovate," says Durkan. "We don't have elastic shelves and we have to keep stock for customers, not products that are not working."

However, many small suppliers – and even large ones such as Heinz and Coca Cola – are concerned about the pressure they face in the fight for this finite shelf space. Kevin argues his product was cut not because he wasn't innovating, but because Coles set him up to fail. "Coles told us it's because our sales weren't achieving targets. But that's because they wouldn't put us in catalogues, we got no shelf space, we were hidden behind a column and they refused to let us have promotions, and that made it impossible for us to compete with the big boys.

"We suspect what they were really doing was targeting the products they wanted to delete so that it would be easier to justify in six to eight months' time."

Where two brands compete for the same shelf, and one brand's parent owns that shelf, it's not hard to tell who the winner will be

Getting in touch

Has one of your favourite products disappeared from the shelves? Email **investigation@choice.com.au** or write to us at 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204 and tell us about it.

You can also phone Coles (1800 061 562) and Woolworths (1300 767 969) to let them know you're not happy and want to see your favourite brands and products return.

ISTOCK PHOTO

Over at Woolworths, brands are also being cut. Mark* had his organic product deleted directly after Woolworths acquired the Macro label. Following steady sales for three years, Woolworths' category buyer told him there was only room for one organic label – Macro, its own. This decision saw his yearly sales halved.

Price wars

It's not just the cost of marketing and economies of scale that keep branded products more expensive than private labels in the supermarkets. There's also the myriad levied fees and rebates. Suppliers tell us that these include ullage (a percentage rebate for potential damage in transit), distribution centre costs, warehouse pallet fees, catalogue and promotion fees. Woolworths and Coles admit "blended" or "variable" costs can be discussed in the cost-price negotiation phase.

Grant Muller is the editor of *FightBack News*, a magazine promoting Australian products and distributed through IGA supermarkets. He claims the supermarkets also engage in cliffing – the auctioning off of shelf space (sometimes called slotting). He says he has examples of multinational corporations offering the chains millions up-front to secure "premium" shelf space. "The chains will go back to the local manufacturer with an opportunity to match or outbid the multinational, but the dollars involved are too great or the supplier gets into a bidding war they can never win.

"All the costs that other brands have to pay mean home brand products have a 30% price competitive advantage, because obviously they don't charge their own products." Coles and Woolworths both deny selling shelf space.

Even when customers appear willing to pay more for the branded product than the home brand, manufacturers overwhelmingly tell CHOICE that the supermarkets forbid them from raising their prices, both wholesale and shelf.

Manufacturers overwhelmingly tell CHOICE that the supermarkets forbid them from raising their prices

Tony Lutfi is the managing director of Greenwheat Freekeh and the only manufacturer who spoke with CHOICE without the condition of anonymity. His product was initially stocked by Coles in 1998 for a short period of time, then re-stocked eight years later after he approached Coles again.

"We should have been selling to Coles at $2.90 per box but they wanted to buy at less than $2.00 a box – the 1998 price," he says. "In spite of repeated pleadings and explanations about our increased costs of grains, labour, freight and gas [for dry roasting] to name a few, they insisted that our selling price to them should not increase in line with market conditions and that we could take it or leave it. We had no choice."

Lutfi also says customers, and even Coles staff, could not locate the product in shops where it was stocked. "So, consumers started asking for Greenwheat Freekeh in other shops." When Lutfi started to sell the product through other retailers, Coles deleted the line from its shelves altogether.

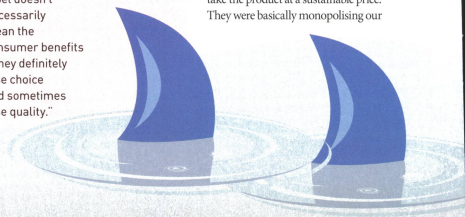
Lutfi says the 1998 price demanded by Coles made his product difficult to sell to other distributors. "Coles was restricting the market because they were keeping the price low, and no other distributor would take the product at a sustainable price. They were basically monopolising our

A question of taste

Is the quality of cheaper home brand products consistent with those produced by big-name brands? In our previous large-scale private label versus leading brand taste and nutrition tests (see *CHOICE*, September and October 2010, or log on to choice.com.au/privatebrand), the results were mixed.

Morris believes home brand quality has been sketchy in the past. "Australia went through a period of bastardised products. When a brand owner is selling quality they have to draw a line in the sand and say they can't make it any cheaper than that. When you make private label, the retailer can tell the manufacturer to make it cheaper, and they will."

Several manufacturers who spoke with CHOICE believe a quality compromise still continues. "I'll guarantee the best-quality product in the range we're involved in isn't a home-branded product," says Matthew*, CEO of one Australian supplier. "The shift towards private label doesn't necessarily mean the consumer benefits – they definitely lose choice and sometimes lose quality."



product by restricting our ability to sell to others. Ultimately they deleted it even though sales were growing.

"All I want Coles to do is reconsider. We'd like to be back in there on commercial grounds so that we can afford to supply them."

One manufacturer says his company is facing intense financial pressure as a result of what he estimates to be a $5 million loss following the "unexpected" deletion of his product from Coles. "We've told them this will have serious ramifications for us. It seriously threatens jobs and we can't continue to operate if retailers continue to kill our brands without reason."

Another told us he believes the treatment is "appalling" and he prefers to deal with IGA or Aldi. "In the future, smaller manufacturers will walk away from the big two because of the way they treat you."

The dark side

When the going gets tough, brands sometimes turn to manufacturing private label goods for supermarkets. Producing the same product under a private label can make better business sense than producing it under your own – in some cases a manufacturer barely need change a thing.

Chris and Diane's* product line was deleted from Woolworths. They were told it was no longer wanted, yet soon after the shelf was stocked with the same type of product but made by a multinational. Woolworths then offered Chris and Diane the opportunity to manufacture the same product for their Select range.

During the negotiation process, Chris and Diane had little say in the final cost price they would be paid, and were required to foot the bill to reformulate recipes and packaging at Woolworths' request. They estimate these costs ran into the millions.

A month after a second package change, the range was deleted.

The future

Australia is in a relatively early phase of home brand expansion. One of the world leaders is the UK where, according to a 2011 Nielsen report, private label sales account for 52% of supermarket sales. The UK's four majors, Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons, have a combined market share of about 76%. Individually, they hold from about 12% to just under 30% of the market.

Morris says that while the UK supermarket landscape is generally positive, private label expansion can go too far, as happened in Sainsbury's a few years ago. "[They] just kept increasing the number of private labels and removing brands. They tried to jam private label down people's throats – it was up to 70% in stores. Customers didn't want to shop there."

As Sainsbury's was aggressively expanding its private label offering, its competitors were moving at a slower pace. So customers went to those shops where choice still existed and, Morris says, Sainsbury's sales dropped and so they had to wind it back.

76%
The grocery market share of the UK's top four supermarkets

71%
The grocery market share of Australia's top two

11%
Estimated percentage of private label products as a share of supermarket sales in the US

While Sainsbury's ventured into an aggressive private label expansion alone, Coles and Woolworths continue their much safer game of follow the leader – each time one launches a new pricing strategy, the other follows. IBISWorld says that "the battle of the private labels is expected to intensify".

But Aussies aren't powerless, because the war for shelf space is really just a battle for your shopping dollars. Morris says it's a simple case of money talks. "Say you go shopping one day and your favourite brand of marmalade is gone. If you complain and then go to other stores, the marmalade will return."

*NOT THEIR REAL NAMES. | ISTOCKPHOTO

Aisle-way robbery

In the world of product marketing, it's not always what's on the inside that counts. Colours, images and packaging shapes are all important visual cues that translate into purchasing decisions. Prior to the mid-2000s, when the supermarkets launched their mid- and top-tier home brand offerings, the selling point of private labels was a lower price, not designer packaging – there was no mistaking the bland look of a no-frills product. But things have changed.

Consumer psychologist Adam Ferrier believes the move away from bargain basement-style generic packaging by the big two is in part designed to make consumers feel better about the products that go into their trolley. "If they're buying a cheaper and inferior product, they don't want to be reminded of that. The more the cheap and inferior product looks like the market leader or higher-quality product, the better people will feel about the purchase. So a home brand product that looks similar to an established brand will be more popular with consumers."

But at what point does a private label product stop being a homage to a market leader and become a copycat? CHOICE went shopping at our local Coles and Woolworths and picked up a trolley of private label and name-brand products. During our trip, on one occasion we even mistakenly picked up a private label product instead of the brand name we were after.

We showed our trolley-load to Ferrier and intellectual property lawyer Anny Slater to find out if similar packaging is innocent or a deliberate manipulation by

When manufacturers' best customers are also their biggest competitors, there's a lot at stake for those who publicly break ranks

01 GRAIN WAVES
"Packaging colour probably influences consumer behaviour more than any other variable, hence it's extremely important to be associated with a colour," says Ferrier. "In my opinion, the use of green here, coupled with the very similar placement of the chips, looks very similar to Grain Waves, presumably so people consider Woolworths' product instead."

02 RADIANT GEL
Ferrier says: "The shape of a product can be an extremely important asset when building a brand. In this instance, the distinctiveness of one product shape appears to have been replicated by another, presumably in an attempt by Woolworths to signal to consumers that their brand is just like the other brand."

03 BOUNTY BAR
"The product shot is hero on this packaging – Woolworths are saying their product is at parity," according to Ferrier. "They've mimicked the 'tropical' theme probably to reinforce the 'coconuttiness' of the brand proposition."

"To prove the products are too similar, a court would consider the colours, artistic work and 2D representation of the coconut bar," says Slater.

the supermarkets. Slater says that while there is nothing wrong with being inspired by a competitor's work, the combined elements of some of the copycats we presented to her are "likely to give rise to confusion in the marketplace". Australia has legal protections in place to prevent companies using others' trademarks or visual assets, but enforcing the law is difficult.

To hold private labels accountable would in most cases require manufacturers of branded products to take legal action. When we approached several suppliers seeking comment on what we saw as copycat packaging, none was prepared to speak out against the supermarkets. When manufacturers' best customers are also their biggest competitors, there's a lot at stake for those who publicly break ranks.

Durkan claims he hasn't had a single incident of customer confusion between copycat products and "wholeheartedly disagrees" with the claim that many Coles products attempt to mimic the goodwill of established brands. A spokesperson for Woolworths told CHOICE that although products with similar ingredients may have similar visual cues, its products do not breach the law.

It's not just an unwillingness to upset the supermarkets that keeps manufacturers from taking legal action. In the past, cases involving passing off and trademark infringements have had a sketchy success rate in the courts. ■

Check next month's *CHOICE* for more on how the big two are moving into retail areas outside of supermarkets.

Copycats

Several causes of action are available to those wishing to protect their intellectual property. IP lawyer Anny Slater and consumer psychologist Adam Ferrier share their thoughts on how these causes may play out with regard to the products below. For more, log on to choice.com.au/copyshop.

Anny Slater

Adam Ferrier

04 SUNSCREEN

"It seems one manufacturer has created a sunscreen that looks very, very similar to another," says Ferrier. "They've used many of the key packaging elements to achieve this similarity, including product format, colours and approximate placement and shape of symbols."

Slater says the court would have to consider the significance of the colours orange and yellow to customers buying sunscreen, and the extent to which they associate them with the Cancer Council.

05 PEANUT BUTTER

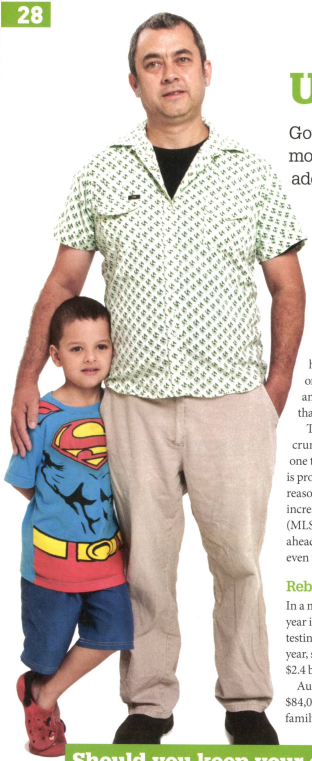
"The fact that the background colours of the labels, the orientation of the integers and the caricature of the peanuts are all substantially different to the Sanitarium label would greatly influence a court's view of any overall similarity," says Slater. "It's unlikely that any liability would attract to using words that describe the product, for example, 'smooth', or humanising a peanut if the result is substantially different."

06 NUTS

"The nuts have borrowed the conventions of nut packaging, including showing lots of nuts spilling out," Ferrier says. "They've also delineated between ranges with colour, using the same colours as others in the nuts market."

To make a judgment, the court would have to consider how snack food packaging is recalled by consumers, and the impact of product packaging colours on buying decisions, says Slater.

ISTOCK PHOTO



Unhealthy gain

Government rules on health insurance already leave most consumers bewildered. Means testing will only add to the confusion, writes **Uta Mihm**

Making sure you have the right level of health insurance cover has never been easy. Paying for it can also be a burden. And matters are about to get worse on both fronts. From 1 July this year, health insurance premiums will increase substantially for high-income earners, and this comes on the heels of an industry-average annual premium increase of more than five per cent from this month.

The good news is that CHOICE has crunched the numbers and cleared up one thing – keeping your hospital cover is probably a good move even if you're a reasonably high earner. The proposed increase to the Medicare Levy Surcharge (MLS) means you'll likely still end up ahead by keeping your hospital cover, even with the reduced rebate.

Rebate and Medicare changes

In a move to rein in about $5 billion a year in health insurance rebates, means testing will apply from 1 July this year, saving the government about $2.4 billion over the next three years.

Australians who earn more than $84,000 (single) or $168,000 (couple/family) in the next financial year will pay much more for hospital and extras insurance, as their rebate will be reduced from 1 July. At the same time, the MLS will be increased for higher-income earners who don't have hospital insurance – an additional tax of up to 1.5% of your income will apply. See opposite for more.

Nutshell

- More than half of those who responded to our survey are unclear about health insurance regulations.
- Even with reduced rebates, most high-income earners will still pay less by keeping their hospital insurance.

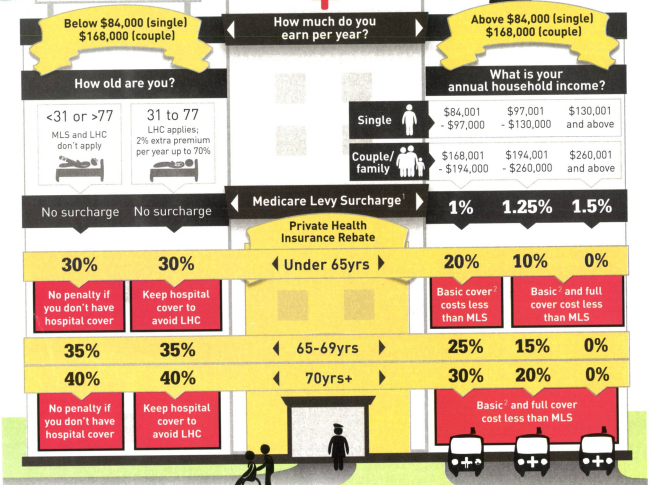
Should you keep your cover?

For hospital cover policies with an excess of up to $500 (single) or $1000 (family), we found:

- **It will normally cost less for you to take out a basic hospital cover policy than pay the MLS** for incomes $84,001-97,000 for singles and $168,001-194,000 for couples/families.
- **Even if you take out full hospital cover and it will still normally cost you less than MLS** if you earn more, or are aged 65 and older and therefore eligible for a higher rebate. The more you earn, the more you save.

MLS = Medicare Levy Surcharge
LHC = Lifetime Health Cover
You can avoid MLS and LHC if you have hospital cover

Will you save with private hospital cover?



JARGON BUSTER

Private Health Insurance Rebate paid by the government on your hospital and extras cover premiums will be means tested from 1 July.

Lifetime Health Cover (LHC) is a surcharge that adds 2% to your premium for every year you don't have hospital insurance after age 31. It can add up to 70% and applies for the first 10 years of your hospital cover, but doesn't apply if you were born on or before 1 July 1934. Once you take out hospital insurance you can drop it for up to 1094 days without penalty.

Basic hospital cover limits and excludes all or a range of services such as heart or eye surgery, IVF, obstetrics and hip/knee replacements. You usually can't jump public hospital waiting lists and may be treated the same as someone without private hospital insurance, so it may not be suitable for your needs. However, it will help you avoid MLS and LHC surcharges.

Full hospital cover includes all services in a private or public hospital, and allows you to jump waiting lists.

Medicare Levy is a 1.5% tax paid by everyone, regardless of whether they have private health insurance (unless they're able to qualify for an exemption or reduction).

Medicare Levy Surcharge (MLS) is an extra tax for high-income earners on top of the Medicare Levy that you can avoid by taking out hospital cover. You can choose cover with an annual excess of up to $500 (single) or $1000 (family). It was 1% for everyone above the cut-off, but from 1 July a stepped rate of 1-1.5% will apply.

NOTES All figures including ages are valid from 1 July 2012. Income levels are for the financial year 2012-13. To calculate your savings we used 2011 CHOICE Best Buy policies with an excess of up to $500 (single) and $1000 (family/couple) for basic and full hospital cover. We added the average increase (5.06%) that came into effect on 1 April. We then reduced the premium by the rebate applicable for each income level and compared the amount against the MLS payable for each income/age group. The graphic shows average results only, and you need to consider your personal circumstances. Health insurance premiums vary depending on the insurance company, cover level and where you live. MLS is a percentage of your income, so if your income is just above the cut-off and/or you use a more expensive hospital policy, you may pay more for it than if you paid the MLS instead. [1] Percentage based on your annual household income. [2] Consider your age and health issues when taking only basic health cover.

Private cover primer

Our calculations found that most high-income earners are still likely to save if they pay for private hospital cover rather than dropping it and paying the extra MLS instead. The more you earn, the more you can save.

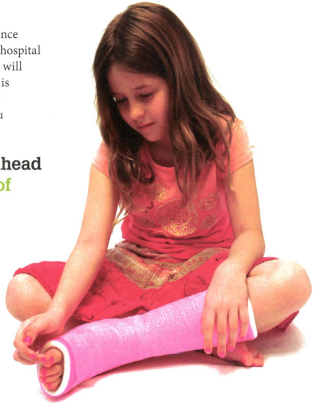
The Private Health Insurance Rebate applies to extras and hospital insurance, so your premium will go up for both if your rebate is reduced. However, MLS and LHC depend on whether you have hospital insurance.

Most high-income earners are likely to be ahead if they keep private hospital cover instead of dropping it and being charged the MLS

You can prepay your annual premium before the end of June 2012 to cover the next 12 months, and any rebate reductions will only apply to premiums you pay after 1 July 2012 (see bubble opposite). Three regulations affect how much health insurance costs you:

- Private Health Insurance Rebate
- MLS
- LHC

So if you drop your extras insurance, there won't be a tax penalty or surcharge. But you'll have to wait if you take up extras again later, as waiting periods of two to 12 months usually apply for most therapies (three years for hearing aids).



Behind closed doors

Some of the best health care funds for customer satisfaction are closed ones

When we asked 2558 CHOICE members to rate their health fund, closed membership funds – those that restrict their membership to specific industries such as police, doctors, transport, electricity, forestry, timber and paper industries and contractors – performed significantly better as a group than open funds. The trouble is, not everyone is eligible.

The most popular closed membership funds with survey respondents were, in order of popularity:

- **Teachers Health Fund** – education union members
- **Defence Health** – Australian Defence Force or Reserve and defence-related government departments and businesses
- **CBHS Health** – current and former employees of the Commonwealth Bank

All three rated significantly better than average for overall satisfaction in hospital and extras cover. Closed funds usually score highly in our health insurance analyses too, due to their low premiums and high benefits. If you're eligible to join one, it's well worth thinking about.

At the other end of the scale, Medibank Private and MBF scored significantly worse than average for overall satisfaction for hospital and extras cover, and NIB scored significantly worse for hospital cover (Australian Unity also performed poorly but had comparatively fewer responses). See Satisfaction Survey, far right.

Poor value for money

Our survey reveals what may be one reason why the government needs the carrot and stick approach to keep Australians in private health cover. When it comes to rating value for money, only 37% of respondents indicated their hospital cover offers excellent or very good value for money. Only 32% said the same for their extras cover. ■

Encore for GMHBA

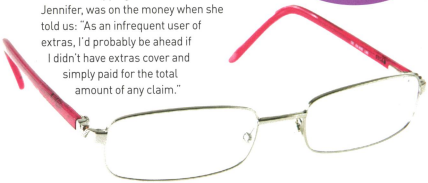
The highest-rated fund, open to everyone, in our satisfaction survey for both hospital and extras was GMHBA. In our 2011 health insurance analysis (see *CHOICE* July 2011), GMHBA's basic hospital and extras covers, Frank Basic and Bronze Extras, were recommended for young singles.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

While extras cover attracts the Private Health Insurance Rebate, some consumers are finding they're not getting value for money.

Check how much you've received in extras claims over the past year against what your new premium will be after means testing kicks in from 1 July. If the benefit is substantially smaller than the premium you pay, consider dropping it. One consumer, Jennifer, was on the money when she told us: "As an infrequent user of extras, I'd probably be ahead if I didn't have extras cover and simply paid for the total amount of any claim."

If you prepay your annual premium by 30 June this year, means testing will not apply to that payment. For the period you prepaid, you will get the full rebate and means testing will only apply to you when your next premium becomes due 12 months later.

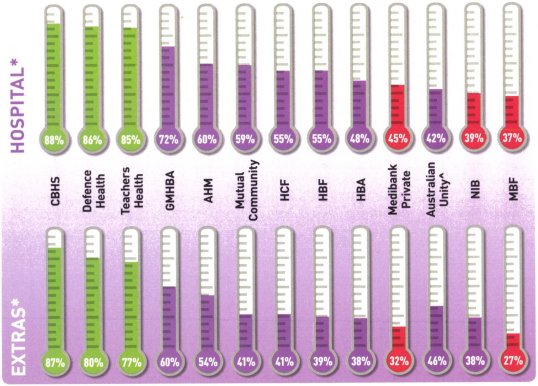


It's complicated

Our survey of 2558 CHOICE members (see below) revealed confusion around health insurance.

- Only 37% knew the government rebate applies to both hospital and extras insurance.
- Only 38% knew that LHC surcharges only apply to hospital insurance (see Jargon Buster, page 29).
- While most respondents knew that some form of hospital insurance is needed to avoid paying the MLS, only eight per cent correctly nominated policies with an annual excess of up to $500 (single) or $1000 (family).
- Only three per cent nominated the income level at which the MLS was applied last financial year – $76,000 for singles and $152,000 for families.

SATISFACTION SURVEY



USING THE TABLE
Highlighted results are significantly better (green) or worse (red) than average results.
NOTES * Percentage of respondents answering "excellent" or "very good" when asked how satisfied they are with their health insurer. We only used results for companies where we had at least 30 responses.
^ Performed poorly but had comparatively fewer responses and so is not significantly different.

For the full product comparison table of prepaid and debit/credit travel cards, log on to **choice.com.au/travelmoney**

Card tricks

It's all about dodging fees where overseas travel money is concerned. **Andy Kollmorgen** tours the current market

Being stung by high ATM and other transaction fees is one of the modern-day perils of overseas travel. In recent years, financial institutions have attempted to dull the pain with travel money cards. They're plastic and portable, and you don't have to carry a wad of cash or manage traveller's cheques. But the trap with these snappy little products is that they have some sneaky fees too.

The travel card market has expanded since our 2009 review, and there are better products now than there were then. But the fees can still sting. There's also a point of confusion that has arisen since our earlier story: the difference between prepaid travel money cards and debit cards set up for overseas travel that are connected to a bank account. The prepaid category is where the fees come in. Debit cards fleece you less, but you need to have an account at that bank.

Then there's a third category that may turn out to be the way of the future – credit cards specifically designed for overseas travel. The potential trendsetter at the moment is the GE Money 28 Degrees MasterCard, our CHOICE Award winner for Best Travel Money Card (see page 17). If you pay off the balance in time (within 55 days) you stand to enjoy fee-free access to cash and credit around the world. As far as we're concerned, this is what a travel money card should do; however, not everyone wants, or can qualify for, a new credit card.

Going prepaid

Prepaid travel money cards may not do you much good if you spend less than about $3000 overseas. That's because the fees you'll pay for having and using the card will likely outweigh any overseas ATM or transaction costs you'd incur if you used your regular bank-issued debit or credit card.

Prepaid vs credit/debit travel cards

Prepaid

PROS Can lock in exchange rate when you load up the card. In the event of a drastic drop in the strength of the Aussie dollar, this can outweigh any fees or other costs.
CONS High fees.

Credit / debit

PROS No load, currency conversion/transaction, inactivity or replacement fees.
CONS Exchange rate depends on when you use the card and generally can't be locked in.

Another thing to get straight is that no two cards are alike, but some are certainly better than others. Of the current market offerings, we like the Commonwealth Bank Travel Money Card because it has no initial load fee or monthly inactivity fee, and has the lowest currency conversion fee (two per cent) for currencies not already loaded on your card. (If, for instance, you decide to dash up to Montreal from Boston and haven't loaded Canadian dollars, CBA will charge you two per cent per transaction for converting your preloaded US dollars to Canadian currency.) The ample opportunities to limit fees are the main reasons we named the CBA card the CHOICE Award runner-up.

The strongest points in favour of prepaid cards are that you can lock in the exchange rate and sit pretty should the Aussie dollar nosedive, and you don't need to open a bank account or fill out a credit card application. The drawback is you'll have to keep your fee-avoidance radar on at all times because, depending on the card, you could be hit up when you buy the card, use an ATM, reload, close the account, use a currency not loaded on the card or don't use the card at all.

One seemingly impressive newcomer to the prepaid category is the MasterCard Multi-Currency Cash Passport. It's the first of its kind available to Australians that offers free ATM use overseas, and can hold up to $100,000 in a single load. But the downside underscores the problem with prepaid cards in general: the 1.1% initial loading fee will cost you $275 if you load $25,000, and you'll get hit with a 5.95% charge if you use currencies not loaded.

CHOICE verdict

The ideal set-up for your next overseas trip is to have a prepaid and a travel-worthy debit or credit card and use either depending on the transaction. But if you're keen to avoid fees and can pay off your balance on time, the 28 Degrees card is the best single way we've found to prevent sneaky fees from nibbling away at your travel budget. ■

PREPAID TRAVEL CARDS

COMMONWEALTH BANK TRAVEL MONEY CARD

CHOICE AWARD RUNNER-UP

Can load up to six currencies; no initial load fee; low purchase fee; 2% conversion fee; no inactivity fee; free back-up card.

High ATM fees; high replacement card fee ($60).

ANZ TRAVEL CARD

Lowest purchase fee ($11) of prepaid travel cards; no initial load fee; multiple currencies available and can load 10 at a time; free back-up card.

High ATM fees; $35 for replacement card.

MASTERCARD MULTI-CURRENCY CASH PASSPORT

No ATM fees; load up to seven currencies; free back-up card; free replacement of lost or stolen cards.

Loading fees can add up; ATM fee of 2.95% if used in Australia; negative balance fee of $20; 5.95% for currencies not loaded on card, $10 closure fee.

TRAVELEX PREPAID MASTERCARD (also called Travelex Cash Passport)

Chip and PIN security; no fee for replacement card; free back-up card.

Single currency card (only one currency at a time); load fees can add up; 8.45% fee for currencies not loaded on card; $10 closure fee.

AMEX GLOBAL TRAVEL CARD

Low ATM fees; free back-up card; no inactivity fees.

Only available in USD, GBP, and EUR; some international merchants may attempt to apply an Amex surcharge, which is disallowed in the US; need a separate card per currency.

DEBIT / CREDIT CARDS

GE MONEY 28 DEGREES MASTERCARD

CHOICE AWARD WINNER

No international transaction, currency conversion or annual fees; no charge for cash advances; 55-day interest-free period.

20.99% pa interest rate for purchases and cash advances is on the high side if you don't pay off the balance in time (55 days); no travel insurance included; have to go through credit card application process.

CITIBANK PLUS TRANSACTION ACCOUNT WITH VISA DEBIT CARD

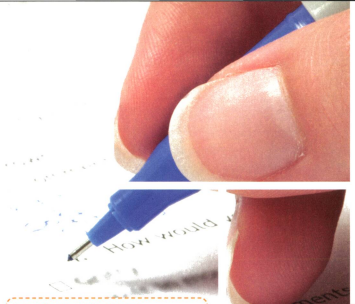
No monthly account-keeping fee; no minimum ongoing balance requirement; free international money transfer to any overseas account.

Must have a Citibank Plus account, which does not pay interest.

NAB GOLD VISA DEBIT CARD

Travel insurance for trips with minimum $500 prepaid overseas transport costs.

Must have an NAB Gold account, which does not pay interest; $90 card fee; $10 monthly account-keeping fee unless you deposit at least $5000 per month; $100 for overseas card replacement.



Brand power

Which products and brands stand the test of time? CHOICE members share all with **Matthew Steen** in our latest reliability survey

HOW WE SURVEY

A big thanks to the 11,444 CHOICE members who took part in our survey in November 2011. The survey identifies the most and least reliable brands, the major problems with products and which brands members are most and least likely to buy again. Products purchased between 2004 and 2011 are analysed for the types of problems users experienced. If your brand isn't listed here, it's because we didn't have a large enough number of responses to report on.

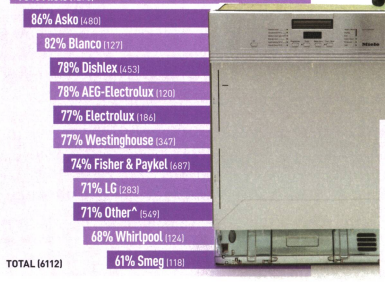
CHOICE conducts its product reliability survey every year to highlight both brand reliability and loyalty. As well as finding that some brands are consistently dependable, what's also interesting is to discover some emerging trends in newer products, such as car GPS.

In our previous product reliability survey (see *CHOICE*, March 2011), we reported on large appliances such as washing machines and TVs, as well as a raft of electronic devices.

This time around, we look at 10 product categories, mostly big-ticket items.

95% of Bosch owners would buy their brand again, followed by Miele (93%) and Asko (92%).

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *



DISHWASHERS

Bosch and **Miele** consistently perform well both in our testing and reliability surveys. At the other end of the spectrum, 39% of **Smeg** owners reported issues with their dishwasher over the past 12 months. More than 67% of respondents own a built-in rather than freestanding model.

WHAT WENT WRONG
Of problems reported

10% Baskets/racks and pumps

11% - Door issues - Door performance

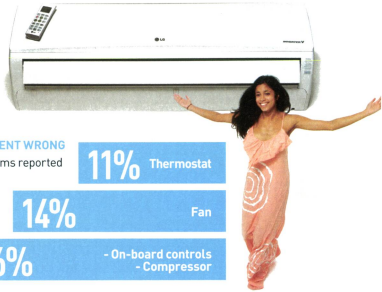
20% Controls or electrics/programs

* THE NUMBER IN BRACKETS IS THE NUMBER OF RESPONSES RECEIVED FOR THAT BRAND. PIE CHARTS ARE LIMITED FOR THE AGE OF THE PRODUCT. ^ 'OTHER' INCLUDES UNBRANDED APPLIANCES, APPLIANCES FOR WHICH THE BRAND WAS UNKNOWN AND BRANDS THAT DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA FOR SAMPLE SIZE (N=50) OR MORE OVERALL AND WITHIN GROUP.

AIR CONDITIONERS

97% Daikin, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Mitsubishi Electric all inspire brand loyalty, with 97% of respondents saying they would buy these brands again, closely followed by Fujitsu and Panasonic.

Of respondents who own an air conditioner, most have split system units (reverse cycle) but all types tend to be reliable. LG scores bottom here for reliability, with only 79% of respondents saying they didn't require a repair in the past 12 months.



WHAT WENT WRONG Of problems reported

- **11%** Thermostat
- **14%** Fan
- **16%** - On-board controls - Compressor

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *
TOTAL (5306)

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *
TOTAL (8055)

Miele (1642)	93%
Bosch (110)	90%
Dyson (2349)	89%
Other^ (913)	86%
Nilfisk (415)	83%
Sanyo (77)	83%
Volta (336)	83%
Electrolux (878)	80%
Kambrook (89)	80%
Samsung (120)	76%
Vax (117)	76%
Hoover (425)	74%
Wertheim (584)	68%

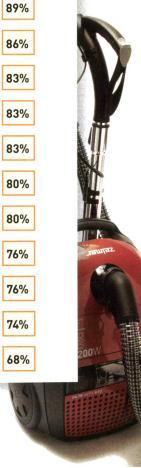
VACUUM CLEANERS

Miele and **Bosch** score well for reliability, and both also tend to do well in our performance tests. These two are followed closely by **Dyson**, which is owned by almost a third of respondents. More than 83% own barrel/canister vacuums, followed by uprights.

95% of Miele owners said they'd buy that brand again followed by 92% of Dyson owners, with Wertheim, Hoover, Kambrook and Samsung at the lower end of the spectrum.

WHAT WENT WRONG Of problems reported

- **19%** Suction
- **16%** Miscellaneous vacuum parts
- **11%** Accessories
- **8%** Motor
- **7%** Filters



COOKTOPS

Smeg and **Miele** rank highest for reliability, and usually perform well in our testing. We also rate **Electrolux**, **Fisher & Paykel** and **Westinghouse** well in our performance testing, but these are only mid-range for reliability.

93% of both Bosch and Miele owners reported they would repurchase the brand, while 41% of Technika owners said they would not.

WHAT WENT WRONG Of problems reported

- **25%** Controls
- **17%** Flame adjustment
- **11%** Element failure
- **5%** Ignition failure

FRIDGES

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *
TOTAL (6908)

92% Kelvinator	(284)
90% Electrolux	(421)
89% Simpson	(74)
89% Westinghouse	(1925)
87% Fisher & Paykel	(2446)
85% Samsung	(450)
84% Whirlpool	(198)
84% LG	(512)
78% Other^	(445)
74% Bosch	(71)
72% Maytag	(82)

We regularly rank **Westinghouse** fridges highly, and it's also a reliable brand. Our testing often reports mid-range scores for **Electrolux** and **Kelvinator**, but they also score well for reliability. **Maytag** and **Bosch** rate low for reliability.

A top-mounted freezer fridge is most commonly owned, followed closely by bottom-mounted freezers and then side-by-side. Pigeon pairs are owned by just fewer than six per cent of fridge owner respondents. Side-by-side and pigeon pair types experience more issues than others.

96% Simpson, a brand no longer sold in Australia, ranks highest for brand loyalty at 96%, followed by Westinghouse (93%) and Electrolux and Kelvinator (both 92%). Fisher & Paykel also scores well with 91%.

WHAT WENT WRONG
Of problems reported

- Controls/ switches **10%**
- Temperature controls **12%**
- Handles or fittings **13%**

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *
TOTAL (4740)

Smeg (395)	92%
Miele (440)	92%
Bosch (355)	91%
Omega (181)	91%
DeLonghi (132)	89%
Ariston (80)	89%
Westinghouse (783)	88%
Fisher & Paykel (270)	87%
Whirlpool (95)	87%
Highland (82)	86%
Blanco (253)	86%
Other^ (956)	86%
Chef (194)	85%
Electrolux (184)	85%
Baumatic (83)	82%
Ilve (151)	81%
Technika (106)	81%

OVENS

Bosch, **Miele** and **AEG** rank highly for reliability – the first two perform well in our tests too. We also recommend **Electrolux** and **Westinghouse**, but both are only mid-range for reliability. **St George** brings up the rear.

95%

of Bosch oven owners would repurchase this brand, followed by 91% of Miele owners. On the other hand, only 42% of Technika oven owners would buy one again.

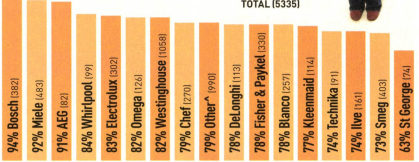
WHAT WENT WRONG

Of problems reported

Thermostat	16%
Controls	17%
Door seals/hinges	18%

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *

TOTAL (5335)



DIGITAL CAMERAS

Digital cameras score well for reliability, all with 90% or greater scores. More than 70% of respondents own a compact camera rather than a DSLR. **Panasonic** and **Sony** rate high for reliability with 94% each, and tend to perform well in our tests too.

98%

of Canon camera owners say they would repurchase this brand, followed closely by Nikon and Panasonic (both 96%).

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *

TOTAL (10,032)

Panasonic (1592)	94%
Sony (838)	94%
Nikon (1072)	93%
Canon (4123)	92%
Kodak (222)	92%
Pentax (330)	91%
Other^ (551)	90%
Fujifilm (429)	90%
Olympus (875)	90%

WHAT WENT WRONG

Of problems reported

Other physical controls	13%
- Battery problems - Jammed lens	16%

CAR GPS

Garmin and **TomTom** brands usually top our performance tests. However, the fewest repairs were to built-in car GPS, with 84% of these having no issues in the past 12 months. But the majority of respondents own portable car GPS.

90%

TomTom and Garmin were equal top for brand loyalty, with 90% willing to repurchase these brands.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Of problems reported

- Slow GPS reception - Poor accuracy	17%

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *

TOTAL (5630)

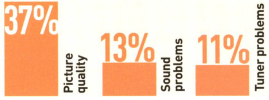
* THE NUMBER IN BRACKETS IS THE NUMBER OF RESPONSES RECEIVED FOR THAT BRAND. PERCENTAGES ARE ADJUSTED FOR THE AGE OF THE PRODUCT. OVERALL AND ^ OTHER PERCENTAGES ARE WEIGHTED AVERAGES. ALL APPLIANCES FOR WHICH THE BRAND WAS UNKNOWN AND BRANDS THAT DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA FOR SAMPLE SIZE (N=50 OR MORE OVERALL AND N=10 OR MORE PER YEAR GROUP).

TVs

TVs are generally reliable products. However, overall the main problem reported is picture quality. Our experts say **Panasonic**, **Sony** and **Samsung** lead the pack for technical performance, and all these brands also rank highly for reliability. **Sanyo** and **Sharp** TVs are generally poorer performers in our tests, though Sharp is a comparatively reliable brand. Almost half of respondents own LCD TVs, followed by plasma at just over 42%.

98% of Panasonic, 96% of Samsung and Pioneer and 95% of Sony owners say they'd buy their brand again. By contrast, 14% of Sanyo and Sharp owners say they wouldn't.

WHAT WENT WRONG Of reported problems



BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS * TOTAL (10,026)

BRAND WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *
TOTAL (7753)

Miele (879)	93%
Bosch (929)	91%
Hoover (136)	87%
Westinghouse (203)	86%
Asko (381)	85%
LG (863)	84%
Fisher & Paykel (2057)	84%
Electrolux (679)	82%
Whirlpool (373)	82%
Simpson (477)	81%
Other^ (288)	81%
Ariston (89)	79%
Samsung (300)	76%
Maytag (99)	64%

WASHING MACHINES

Asko, **Bosch**, **Electrolux**, **LG**, **Miele**, **Simpson** and **Whirlpool** all made the What to Buy list in our recent test (*CHOICE*, February 2012). Miele and Bosch scored best at 93% and 91% respectively for reliability. **Maytag** is the least reliable brand with 64%. ■

97% of Miele, 94% of Bosch and 92% of Asko owners said they'd buy these brands again. Loyalty for all other brands recommended in our last test falls between 83% and 87%

WHAT WENT WRONG Of reported problems

* THE NUMBER IN BRACKETS IS THE NUMBER OF RESPONSES RECEIVED FOR THAT BRAND. PERCENTAGES ARE ADJUSTED FOR THE AGE OF THE PRODUCT. ^ 'OTHER' INCLUDES UNBRANDED APPLIANCES, APPLIANCES FOR WHICH THE BRAND WAS UNKNOWN AND BRANDS THAT DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA FOR SAMPLE SIZE (N=50 OR MORE OVERALL AND N=10 OR MORE PER YEAR GROUP).

Safe or sorry?

Karina Bray gets her head around the contradictory advice regarding cancer risk and our diets

About one-third of cancers are estimated to be caused by diet, body weight and physical inactivity – all modifiable lifestyle choices. Keeping a healthy body weight and exercising 30 minutes a day is fairly straightforward, but it's hard to keep track of the latest advice on foods when seemingly contradictory information floods the media from one week to the next.

What increases your risk?

Acrylamide

Frying, toasting or baking some starchy foods to the point they go dark brown can cause the formation of acrylamides, which have been found to cause cancer in animals – though not humans as yet. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) (see page 40) lists acrylamide as a group 2A carcinogen – that is, it's probably carcinogenic to humans. The main culprits are potato chips and other fried and baked forms of potatoes, as well as toast and biscuits. When you cook these foods, keeping them light brown rather than dark or burnt can reduce acrylamide formation. Acrylamide is also found in coffee.

Alcohol

There's convincing evidence that alcohol, even in small amounts, increases the risk of cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus and breast, as well as colorectal cancer in men. It may also increase the risk of colorectal cancer and liver cancer in women. Alcohol in mouthwash is also linked with oral cancer. Recognising the potential cardiovascular benefits of small amounts, authorities recommend limiting alcohol to less than one drink per day for women and two for men. But it seems not all alcohol is created equal – see page 40 for more.

Good for you!

Plant foods including fruit, non-starchy vegetables, herbs, spices, olive oil, wholegrains, nuts, seeds and legumes contain various phytochemicals known to prevent cancer. A diet that includes a wide variety of plant foods is also associated with a reduced risk of cancer.

Sugar

It's popularly believed that sugar feeds cancer. Therefore, proponents argue, eliminating all refined sugars and other sources of sugar and carbohydrates such as bread, pasta, fruit and sweet foods and drinks can prevent or halt the progression of cancer.

All cells, including cancer cells, use sugar for energy. If they don't get it from food, they get it from breaking down protein and fat, so denying yourself all sugar won't help stop cancer. Furthermore, cancer sufferers need excellent nutrition to counteract the effects of treatment, and depriving yourself of entire food groups such as carbohydrates is counterproductive.

But that doesn't mean lots of sugar is OK. Emerging research suggests that excess insulin – which occurs with fast, high peaks of glucose in the bloodstream – can drive the growth of cancer cells. Also, excess sugar can lead to weight gain, and obesity is a risk factor for cancer. So it makes sense to eat a low glycaemic diet of wholegrains, vegetables, fruit (not juice) and unsweetened dairy products to avoid the sugar peaks associated with excess insulin.

Red and processed meats

There's evidence red meat (beef, pork, lamb and goat) and processed meats (such as hot dogs, ham, and salami) increase the risk of colorectal cancer. The World Cancer Research Fund recommends you limit red meat to less than 500 grams per week, and avoid processed meats. It also recommends children not be given processed meats at all.

Salt

High intake can damage the lining of the stomach, and salty and salt-preserved foods are likely to increase the risk of stomach cancer. ■

Acidic foods & cancer

Myth

Some people maintain that eating acidic foods or foods that otherwise make the body more acidic enhance cancer cell growth and should thus be avoided in favour of "alkalinising" foods.

Fact

The body's acid-base balance is tightly regulated by the respiratory system and kidneys, and is virtually impossible to change – even a slight change in pH can be life-threatening.

The WHO & cancer

The IARC is part of the World Health Organization. Its role is to conduct and coordinate research into carcinogens and cancer and it regularly reviews evidence to categorise the carcinogenic potential of products and processes to humans into one of five categories:

Group 1: carcinogenic to humans (includes *Helicobacter pylori* / infection, plutonium, solar radiation, tobacco smoking)

Group 2A: probably carcinogenic to humans (includes anabolic steroids, emissions from indoor fires, diesel engine exhaust)

Group 2B: possibly carcinogenic to humans (includes DDT, lead, naphthalene)

Group 3: not classifiable as for carcinogenicity in humans

Group 4: probably not carcinogenic to humans.

In addition to foods discussed in this story, the IARC lists the following as potential carcinogens:

- Cantonese-style salted fish (Group 1)
- Emissions from high temperature (greater than 230°C) frying (Group 2A)
- Asian-style pickled vegetables (Group 2B)

COFFEE The IARC has classified coffee as a 2B carcinogen for bladder cancer, meaning it possibly causes it. However, ongoing epidemiological research has found only a weak link, which may be due to other lifestyle habits such as smoking that may be more prevalent among coffee-drinkers than non-drinkers. A recent meta-analysis found coffee, which contains antioxidants, appears to be protective against colorectal cancer, with growing evidence it protects against skin cancer.

The red wine paradox

Researchers and their PR teams regularly pump out good-news stories about the cardiovascular and cancer-fighting benefits of red wine. It's rich in antioxidants from the skin and seeds of grapes that the alcohol helps release.

However, doom and gloom stories of alcohol – including red wine – causing cancer are also regularly thrown into the mix. We've read headlines about red wine and cancer over the past 20 years, and found red wine fights all cancer, fights lung cancer, causes breast cancer, fights bowel cancer, causes all cancer, fights all cancer (again), fights prostate cancer, causes mouth cancer, fights breast cancer, causes breast cancer (again)...

All this might be good for continuation of research grants, but for us punters it's enough to turn us to drink!

A bet each way

Some foods are blamed for causing as well as preventing cancer. So what's the real story?

GRAPEFRUIT While largely promoted for its cancer-protective antioxidants, a large, well-publicised study in 2007 found grapefruit consumption was linked with increased risk of breast cancer. Grapefruit contains chemicals that interfere with the metabolism of oestrogen, and it's thought that increased levels of oestrogen may have been responsible for the increased risk. However, subsequent larger studies have found no link between grapefruit and breast cancer, and other studies have also shown that grapefruit or grapefruit juice may be protective against prostate, pancreatic and oral cancers.

MILK There's good evidence that milk protects against colorectal cancer. Conversely, diets high in calcium have been linked with prostate cancer. However, the amount of calcium linked with increased risk of prostate cancer is high – 2000mg or more per day, the equivalent of consuming about 1.5L of milk every day – and up to twice the recommended daily intake. Some studies have found no link between prostate cancer and calcium, with one recent large US study finding high calcium intake reduced prostate cancer in non-Caucasian men.

ANTIOXIDANTS Foods rich in antioxidants can help reduce the risk of cancer. However, high-dose supplements of some antioxidants may cause cancer: beta-carotene and retinol supplements have been found to cause lung cancer in smokers. Also, paradoxically, free radicals may be necessary to kill off tumour cells, so high doses of antioxidants may be counterproductive.

CHILLI contains high levels of capsaicin, which has been shown to slow the growth of tumours. However, eating lots of chilli is associated with a higher risk of stomach cancer. This could be because chilli can be used to disguise spoilt food, and data may be confounded by *Helicobacter pylori* infection (which causes stomach ulcers and cancer), lack of refrigeration or the socioeconomic status of these population groups.

SOY contains phytoestrogens – plant chemicals that have a weak hormonal effect on the body. It's been suggested that it may increase the risk of hormone-related cancers such as breast and prostate cancer. But research suggests it may also decrease the risk of prostate cancer, due to its inhibiting effect on the testosterone-induced growth of the prostate. Its role in breast cancer is less clear, and women with oestrogen-dependent breast cancers are advised to limit soy in their diet.

The juice on poppers

Is there a place for poppers in your child's lunchbox? **Rachel Clemons** finds out

WHAT TO BUY

Toddler Pops Apple Blackcurrant (150mL)*

It's the start of a new school term, and once again you're faced with the dilemma of what to give your child for a lunch drink. If you're contemplating a fruit popper (juice) there's no shortage of choice – we found 100 different varieties in major supermarkets. But a few factors are worth considering before you pack one in their lunchbox.

Pure, 100% juice can provide valuable nutrients such as vitamin C and folate. But it doesn't have the fibre of fresh fruit, and Australian dietary guidelines advise that we only occasionally substitute 100% juice for fruit pieces when counting towards the recommended two serves a day. A serve of juice is defined as 125mL – most poppers contain double this amount.

Fruit drinks contain minimal juice (40% tops for the fruit drink products in our review) and added sugar, and for the most part should be a treat only. Golden Circle Pineapple and Golden Circle Sunshine Punch, for example, each give you more than six teaspoons (30.5g) of sugars in a 250mL pack. Others also contain some nasty artificial colours (see Colouring In, opposite).

Details of all poppers on review, including the additives they contain, can be found at choice.com.au/juicepoppers

Diet and dental fodder

Like soft drinks, sugar-sweetened fruit drinks are energy dense and nutrient poor – in other words they're packed with kilojoules and offer little in the way of nutrients. Add to this the fact that drinking sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with increased risk of weight gain, and you may think twice before sending your child off to school with a fruit drink every day.

Sugary drinks can also contribute to dental decay. Drinks that are both sugary and acidic – fruit juices and drinks as well as fizzy drinks – tend to be the worst offenders. A CHOICE test of processed foods and drinks (see *CHOICE*, July 2010) found many food and drink products promoted for kids' lunchboxes fall into this high-risk category – including some we looked at here. ■

Pop in the box

As any dietitian will tell you, water is the best everyday drink for children. The occasional 100% fruit juice is fine, however, and can add variety to their lunchbox. Just keep it to a 125mL serve if you're filling the drink bottle yourself, and dilute with water to provide better hydration.

But if the convenience of a popper is what you're after, the products listed here contain no added sugar and, although the larger serve size of some isn't ideal, deliver 340kJ or less per pack – roughly the equivalent of a medium apple or orange.

$166.5m

The value of the lunchbox juice/drink market in Australia in 2011

COLOURING IN

Many parents want to know whether the food and drinks they choose for their kids are free of artificial additives. Artificial colours sunset yellow FCF (additive number 110), quinoline yellow (104), carmoisine (122), allura red AC (129), tartrazine (102) and ponceau 4R (124) in particular have been flagged as additives that kids who show signs of hyperactivity should avoid.

Of the poppers we reviewed, Glo Orange Mango, Berry Blast, Apple Mango and Orange varieties and Pop Top Orange and Wild Berries varieties each contain one or more of these. Concern about these additives spiked in 2007, when researchers at the University of Southampton in the UK published research linking these colours and the preservative sodium benzoate to increased hyperactivity in some children. However, later reviews by the European Food Safety Authority and US Food and Drug Administration concluded a causal link between exposure to the individual colours and possible effects on behaviour wasn't borne out by the available evidence.

Despite this, it is mandatory in the European Union for food and drinks containing any of these six colours to carry the warning: "May have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children." The UK's Food Standards Agency actively encourages the food industry to participate in a voluntary ban of these colours in foods.

Australian food regulator FSANZ advises that its 2006 study found Australian manufacturers use these colours at much lower levels than those of the Southampton study.

Prices are per 100mL. *Toddler Pops are just 35% juice, but otherwise meet our criteria – just bear in mind you're paying that price for juice diluted with water.

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

I recently asked my super fund manager if any fees were being paid to an adviser from my account. They said yes – to the person from the bank who signed me up with its products more than 10 years ago. I haven't spoken with that adviser ever since and certainly haven't received any further financial advice. Is there any way I can have this unfair situation rectified?

Andy Kollmorgen

CHOICE finance expert Andy Kollmorgen replies: This type of passive income trickery is exactly what the "opt-in" provisions of the Future of Financial Advice reforms, due to start rolling out in July, are designed to stop. Under the current reform proposals, advisers will have to demonstrate the value of what they provide to clients every two years and make sure they understand their advice needs. Clients will then have a chance to opt in or out and only pay for advice on an ongoing basis if they're happy with the advice they've been getting.

Unfortunately, this comes too late for the many people in situations such as yours. Your best option is to tell your manager you want to change to a commission-free arrangement – but beware of any exit fees from your current fund.

We recently purchased wines from a catalogue because they were advertised as Marlborough sauvignon blancs. But although the bottles have "Product of New Zealand" written on the label, the labels also state "Produced by Van Diemen Distillery" and give an address in SA (not Tasmania, as you might assume). Are we victims of false advertising?

CHOICE food labelling expert Angela McDougall responds: We contacted Van Diemen Distillery, which confirmed that the wines are indeed made in New Zealand from NZ grapes. The company has both a spirit licence held in Tasmania and a wine licence held in the Coonawarra – hence the South Australian address on the label.

On the surface this all makes sense, but we agree that putting "product of" and "produced by" on the same label is confusing. This is yet another example of the lack of clarity in country of origin labelling – something CHOICE is campaigning for improvement in. See choice.com.au/country-of-origin-labelling for more.

Angela McDougall

Fiona Mair

I was interested to read your recommendation to avoid refreezing defrosted food (*CHOICE*, May 2011), as it conflicts with advice I received from a seafood retailer about the defrosted frozen salmon I bought there. They told me that if seafood has been properly thawed and handled (thawed and stored with proper refrigeration and not kept at room temperature) there are no added food risks to re-freezing it. Who is correct?

CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair replies: The information you received from the store is correct. But can you always trust how food has been thawed and handled in stores?

Under the right conditions, and assuming the fish has been frozen fresh and thawed in the fridge and not in a microwave or out on the bench, it's fine to refreeze it. However, it's better to be safe than sorry when it comes to food safety, so personally I would not refreeze or recommend that members do so. Freezing and thawing can also affect texture and flavour, so you may want to consider using fish that has undergone these processes in other ways such as in a soup, casserole or pie.

Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Lab Tests

Ovens, iPod docks and strollers – they're all on test here

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Roast, grind and machine your way to the perfect espresso

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CHOICE lives in your world when it comes to dishwasher testing

56 Ovens
Are the less expensive models really so half-baked?

60 Gas heaters
Winter's just around the corner, so get in early to beat the rush

63 Recording TV
DVRs, set-top boxes, TVs that record and USB tuners – we make sense of your many options

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Quality won't go down when you turn up the sound on our recommended models

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There are safety failures, and then there are safety failures...

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Why aren't manufacturers keeping up with new standards?

The rockingest iPod docks are on page 66

CHOICE's Chris Ruggles gets a bit rock'n'roll for our latest iPod dock testing

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE Shopper
For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE subscriber number.

CHOICE Online
Wherever you see a mouse icon, there is more information about this test at **choice.com.au**.

CHOICE Best Buy
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

The perfect cup

A good espresso machine is essential for a great cup of coffee. True aficionados might want a roaster and grinder too, says **Rebecca Gatto**

Roasters

If you're a coffee aficionado who likes to control the freshness and flavour of your coffee, look no further than a home coffee roaster. Roasting your own beans takes some practice but allows you to create coffee to suit your taste and can be cheaper than supermarket or boutique coffee.

Roasting changes the colour and aroma of the beans, producing different flavours. Cracking noises indicate different stages of the roasting process. You'll hear the first crack as all the moisture escapes the beans. At this point, sugars start to caramelise and your coffee is roasted – however, this is the lightest roast. As roasting continues, the oils in the beans are released, creating more flavour. Once you hear the second crack, your beans will be quite dark. Roasting beyond this point will result in a harsh and bitter coffee. Once you've reached your desired roast, start the cooling cycle. The beans continue to roast under their own heat, so be sure to cool them quickly. A lot of smoke is created during roasting, so turn on a fan, open a window or roast outside.

You can buy raw green coffee beans from sites such as coffeesnobs.com.au, dibartoli.com.au or greenbeancoffee.com.au.

CALL US TODAY
choice SHOPPER
1300 360 655

Nutshell

- We take a look at what's available for keen coffee fans, putting four roasters, 12 grinders and 10 new espresso machines to the test.
- The perfect cup of coffee always starts with fresh beans.

WHAT TO BUY

90%
Hottop Coffee Roaster KN-8828B

dibartoli.com.au

Despite being expensive and heavy, this machine is an excellent performer, with features that mimic commercial roasters. It has time, temperature, heating power and fan speed settings, as well as pre-programmed and programmable settings and a roasting guide. It's very easy to use and quiet, but cleaning is slightly more complex compared with other models and its filter needs to be replaced periodically.

70%
Behmor 1600 TO9500T

coffeesnobs.com.au

This roaster performs well and is very quiet, although visibility of the beans isn't as good as for the other roasters (see What to Look For, opposite) and it's fairly large and bulky. Cleaning it isn't particularly easy and we found the roasting chamber and chaff collector fiddly to put in the roaster. It's also slow to cool the beans, though you can speed this up by opening the door.

80%
I-Coffee N-901CR Coffee Bean Roaster + Bean Cooler

dibartoli.com.au
This roaster is quiet and has good visibility during roasting. It's very easy to use and clean and its compact design makes it easy to store, but it only accommodates 150g of beans per roast. An optional bean cooler is available, to which you transfer the beans once roasting is complete.

70%
Gene Café Coffee Bean Roaster CBR-101

dibartoli.com.au
This roaster has a roasting guide and good visibility through the chamber but is slow to cool the beans. It's very easy to use, especially when adjusting time and temperature settings. Take care when inserting the roasting chamber as you need to ensure it's aligned properly. It accommodates 300g of beans per roast but is large and bulky to store.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Roasting capacity Consider how much coffee you'll want to roast in one batch.
Quiet to operate so you can hear the first and second cracks.
A separate cooling tray helps cool the beans quickly. The Hottop has one, and you can buy one for the I-Coffee as an optional extra.
Good view of the roasting chamber. Once you hear the first crack the beans will darken quickly, so you need to be able to keep an eye on them.

HOW WE TEST
For details on how we test grinders, roasters and espresso machines, log on to choice.com.au/espressomachines

Grinders

Once you've roasted your green beans, the next step is to grind them. Pre-ground coffee from the supermarket can be convenient, but coffee deteriorates quickly after grinding and you can't tell how long packs have been sitting on the shelves. With a grinder, you can extract the full flavour and freshness of coffee immediately before making the shot.

There are two types of grinders – burr and blade (see What to Look For, page 49). Blade models are unlikely to achieve the fineness and consistency of grind required for espresso machines. We recommend a burr grinder, and put 12 to the test here.

We changed our performance test for this round, so results are no longer comparable with previous tests. Each grinder is adjusted to produce a grind suitable for our semi-commercial ECM Giotto machine and the quality of each shot is assessed.

How to...
Get the freshest grind

Grind coffee immediately before making the shot. Coffee is at its peak five to seven days after roasting. Whole beans are best within one month of roasting; however, once coffee is ground it's at its best within an hour.
Grind only as much coffee as you need as it deteriorates quickly after grinding.
Experiment with the grind settings to find what suits your machine. A grind that's too coarse will have poor flavour and crema; if it's too fine it can block the filter.
Clean the hopper and the ground coffee container regularly Coffee is oily and can go rancid after a while.
Store your beans in your freezer, fridge or in an airtight container in a cool dark place. Our tester, Peter Horvath, recommends using beans from a boutique supplier.

WHAT TO BUY

These grinders are excellent performers and can all grind directly into the filter basket. They're easy to clean except the **Rancilio**, as its hopper isn't removable. All have good markings except the **Isomac**, **Nuova Simonelli** and **Sunbeam Conical Burr**. The Nuova Simonelli and **Sunbeam Grind Master** are very noisy during operation, and the Sunbeam Conical Burr and Grind Master have some static that causes small coffee particles to fly out. The **La Pavoni** and Isomac have no safety cut-out and fingers can access the grinding wheels when the hopper is removed.

ABOUT THE REST

Models that don't make the cut are let down by their performance, failing to create the required fineness of grind. While they're easy to use, readjusting the grinding mechanism is a common problem (except with the Kitchen Aid).

92% Sunbeam Grind Master EMO360, $119

92% Sunbeam Conical Burr EMO450, $139

93% Isomac Granmacinino, $440

93% Rancilio Rocky No Doser, $499

94% La Pavoni Jolly Dosato V230, $428

GRINDERS		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Fineness of grind score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Fineness settings	Cord storage	Doser	Automatic switch-off	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Noise (dB)	Contact
Sunbeam Café Series EM0490	249	97	100	90	25	✓		✓	38 x 14 x 23	2.5	76	sunbeam.com.au
La Pavoni Jolly Dosato V230	428	94	100	80	50		✓		31 x 14 x 25	4.4	76	euroespresso.com.au
Isomac Granmacinino	440	93	100	75	31				33 x 14 x 19	3.4	76	dibartoli.com.au
Nuova Simonelli Grinta AMM	479	93	100	75	50				42 x 14 x 21	3.6	81	siennacoffee.com.au
Rancilio Rocky No Doser	499	93	100	78	50				35 x 13 x 25	6.0	74	dibartoli.com.au
Sunbeam Conical Burr EM0450	139	92	100	73	25	✓			38 x 14 x 26	2.0	76	sunbeam.com.au
Sunbeam Grind Master EM0360	119	92	100	73	24				38 x 12 x 12	1.1	81	sunbeam.com.au
Breville The Smart Grinder with Dosing IQ BCG800	300	52	40	80	25	✓		✓	39 x 17 x 22	2.8	73	breville.com.au
Kitchen Aid Artisan Burr Grinder KCG100	365	51	40	75	15	✓			35 x 15 x 26	4.9	73	petermcinnes.com.au
Bodum Bistro Electric Coffee Grinder 10903	159	49	40	70	na	✓		✓	28 x 17 x 18	1.5	78	kitchenwaredirect.com.au
DeLonghi KG100	179	37	20	75	16	✓		✓	28 x 14 x 17	1.6	72	delonghi.com.au
Breville Bar Aroma Coffee & Spice Grinder BCG450	200	36	20	73	33	✓		✓	29 x 13 x 17	2.0	78	breville.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of fineness of grind (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Features** See What to Look For, right. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2012. **TABLE NOTES na** Not applicable.

Espresso machines

93% Nuova Simonelli Grinta AMM, $479

97% Sunbeam Café Series EM0490, $249

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Burr-style grinder is the most suitable for a home espresso machine. The grind produced is more uniform than that of blade grinders.
A **doser** allows you to fill the filter basket with ground coffee by pulling a lever.
Different fineness settings allow you to adjust the grind to suit different beans or coffee-making systems.
Automatic switch-off means the machine will automatically stop if the beans run out.
A **group handle rest** reduces grind spill-over.
A **shutter** stops the beans falling out when removed. The Sunbeam Conical Burr and Sunbeam Café Series have this.
Cord storage keeps the cord neat and tidy.

Once you've got the grind right, you need the right machine to finish the job. A **semi-automatic** machine will automatically turn off once the preset amount of coffee is poured, whereas you'll need to cut off the coffee flow yourself with a **manual** machine. A **capsule** machine uses small capsules filled with enough coffee for a single shot. Simply insert the capsule and the machine pierces it to allow hot water to flow through and make the shot.

MORE TIPS
Log on to choice.com.au/makingcoffee for our step-by-step guides on how to use your coffee machine and froth milk

Look for a machine that delivers the right temperature of water and does so consistently. Also check the milk-frothing performance if that's a feature you'll use.

We tested 10 new machines – five manual, three capsule and two semi-automatic – and compared the results with 22 previously tested models. Three new models make our What to Buy list (page 51), two of which are capsule machines. Only the Breville Dual Boiler has a good result among our newly tested models. However, our test looks at how well these machines deliver a good cup of coffee using a widely available brand of beans. If you use better-quality beans and follow our tips below, you can achieve a better result.

How to...

Tamp

Tamping compresses your coffee in the filter basket, letting the pressurised water flow through the coffee evenly to give you a quality shot.
Dose the ground coffee into the filter and place the filter on a flat, stable surface. Gently level the coffee.
Apply the first tamp. Hold the tamper firmly in one hand. Place the tamper on top of the coffee so it's parallel to the surface and press downwards. One firm tamp should be enough, followed by a wipe of the top of the filter basket to remove any loose coffee particles.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Milk frothing mechanism If you like cappuccinos, lattes or mochas, check it will make the desirable creamy froth without large air bubbles.
An **exterior with few cracks and crevices** will allow for easier cleaning.
Cup-warming plate All newly tested models except the DeLonghi Lattissima, Map and Expressi have one.
A **large-capacity water tank** that's easy to fill, a **large filter basket** that's easy to fill and empty, and an **easy-to-clean drip tray**. Keep water in the tank fresh.
Controls should be easy to use, labelling simple to understand and operation lights should be clearly visible.
Programmable coffee delivery allows you to adjust the amount of coffee in your cup. ▸

ESPRESSO MACHINES	Price ($)	Type	PERFORMANCE: Overall score (%)	COFFEE-MAKING: Coffee-making score (%)	Taste test score (%)	Coffee temperature score (%)	Coffee temperature consistency score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Milk frothing score (%)	FEATURES: Automatic power turn-off	Standby mode	Cup-warming plate	Cord storage	Programmable coffee quantity	SPECIFICATIONS: Type of heating system	H
Sunbeam Café Latte EM5600	329	M	76	76	75	75	85	76	75	✓		✓			Thermoblock	0
# Breville The Dual Boiler BES900	1499	S	75	70	65	76	100	82	85	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Dual boiler	5
# DeLonghi Lattissima+ EN520.S (A)	480	C	74	69	65	78	88	84	75	✓			✓	✓	Thermoblock	1
Breville Fresca BES860	800	S	73	71	70	72	75	76	75 (E)	✓		✓	✓	✓	Thermoblock	0
Sunbeam Café Espresso EM3800	199	M	72	72	70	75	83	72	70			✓			Thermoblock	1
DeLonghi Nespresso Essenza EN95R (A)	379	C	70	65	65	75	58	82	60					✓	Thermoblock	1
# Map Bella SO4 (B)	299	C	70	63	60	74	75	86	60		✓			✓	Thermoblock	0
Rancilio Miss Silvia	790	M	70	65	65	73	60	74	90			✓	✓		Boiler	2
# Breville Professional 800 Collection BES820	550	S	69	65	60	82	85	78	65 (E)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Thermoblock	1
Breville Café Venezia BES250	200	M	67	64	60	75	80	74	65 (E)			✓			Thermoblock	1
# Expobar Office SA	1650	M	67	61	55	75	95	68	100			✓	✓		Boiler	4
Sunbeam Café Series Twin EM6910	799	S	67	57	50	72	98	80	85	✓		✓	✓	✓	Thermoblock	2
Breville BarVista BES200	170	M	65	63	60	75	75	72	60 (E)			✓			Thermoblock	1
DeLonghi EN265CWAE Citiz and Milk (A)	549	C	65	58	55	74	70	82	60		✓			✓	Thermoblock	1
Krups XP 5280	400	S	65	64	60	81	80	78	35	✓		✓		✓	Thermoblock	0
# DeLonghi Icona ECO310.R	299	M	64	58	50	84	93	72	75 (E)			✓			Boiler	1
# Sunbeam Café Crema II EM4820	229	M	64	56	50	75	88	78	65			✓			Thermoblock	1
Breville 800ES	450	M	63	56	50	75	83	74	75 (E)			✓	✓		Thermoblock	2
Lavazza A Modo Mio Premium (C)	399	C	62	55	50	82	65	84	40		✓			✓	ns	1
# Expressi The Capsule Machine K-fee 11 1B04 + MilkFrother (D)	79	C	61	48	40	78	80	86	60	✓				✓	Thermoblock	0
Gaggia Classic	600	M	60	55	50	74	80	76	40			✓			ns	6
Nuova Simonelli Oscar Professional	1499	M	60	52	45	73	88	64	100			✓			Boiler	9
# Sunbeam Piccolo Espresso EM2800	119	M	60	52	45	69	95	74	70			✓			Thermoblock	1
Gaggia Baby Twin	799	S	59	56	50	73	88	74	35			✓		✓	Boiler	6
# La Pavoni Eurobar EBR24A	795	M	59	49	40	81	93	74	75 (E)			✓	✓		Boiler	1
Saeco Via Venezia Espresso	499	M	59	49	40	80	93	72	80 (E)			✓	✓		Boiler	1
Lavazza A Modo Mio Extra (C)	299	C	54	41	35	82	48	80	55						ns	1
Sunbeam Café Espresso EM3600	159	M	51	45	35	79	88	56	70			✓			Thermoblock	1
La Pavoni Stradivari SPL	1490	H	48	44	35	84	73	46	75						Boiler	10
Ilve by Ascaso Dream MF Versatile	1099	M	47	35	25	69	80	68	60			✓	✓		ns	2
Bugatti Diva	1099	M	46	44	35	75	83	48	50			✓			Boiler	3
La Pavoni Stradivari STL	1149	H	35	18	10	79	18	60	60						Boiler	6

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of coffee-making (60%), ease of use (30%) and milk frothing (10%). **Coffee making score** is made up of taste test (80%), coffee temperature (10%) and coffee (10%). **Type M** Manual. **S** Semi-automatic. **C** Capsule. **H** Hand pump. **Heat-up time** is the time taken to heat the machine to operating temperature – this isn't scored. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2 Roma capsules used. **(B)** Map Venezia capsules used. **(C)** Lavazza Appassionatamente capsules used. **(D)** Only available at Aldi. Expressi Milano capsules used. **(E)** This was done with the froth enhancer removed as this

(min:sec)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Contact
0	33 x 26 x 27	9.1	sunbeam.com.au
5	38 x 40 x 38	12.2	breville.com.au
0	26 x 17 x 33	4.5	delonghi.com
0	37 x 33 x 31	10.4	breville.com.au
0	33 x 21 x 27	5.8	sunbeam.com.au
5 (F)	26 x 17 x 29	3.0	delonghi.com.au
0	30 x 17 x 26	4.0	mapcoffee.com.au
5	35 x 24 x 29	12.0	grinderscoffee.com.au
0	32 x 28 x 30	7.3	breville.com.au
0	33 x 23 x 29	5.9	breville.com.au
5	38 x 24 x 45	17.4	dibartoli.com.au
0	38 x 33 x 33	11.0	sunbeam.com.au
0	31 x 22 x 28	4.5	breville.com.au
0	28 x 24 x 38	4.7	delonghi.com.au
7	32 x 23 x 28	5.0	krups.com
0	32 x 26 x 29	3.8	delonghi.com
5	32 x 25 x 28	6.0	sunbeam.com.au
00	32 x 26 x 31	11.2	breville.com.au
30	31 x 24 x 36	4.9	lavazza.com.au
25	30 x 15 x 35	3.7	aldi.com.au
0	36 x 22 x 27	7.3	coffeeitalia.com.au
30	39 x 30 x 37	14.2	siennacoffee.com.au
20	30 x 21 x 27	3.7	sunbeam.com.au
00	40 x 25 x 27	7.3	coffeeitalia.com.au
25	30 x 22 x 27	5.4	euroespresso.com.au
20	33 x 24 x 29	7.0	saeco.com.au
00 (F)	31 x 24 x 36	4.8	lavazza.com.au
45	33 x 21 x 28	5.8	sunbeam.com.au
40	32 x 21 x 44	6.0	euroespresso.com.au
15 (F)	34 x 24 x 28	7.3	ilve.com.au
20	38 x 25 x 27	7.6	coffeemachine.com.au
:50	32 x 21 x 31	5.8	euroespresso.com.au

mperature consistency when making four consecutive cups of
BLE NOTES # Newly tested model. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** Nespresso
ethod gives a better result. **(F)** Only 100mL at a time.

WHAT TO BUY

NEWLY TESTED

75%
Breville The Dual Boiler BES900

Good points
- Automatic power turn-on/off
- Programmable coffee delivery
- Adjustable water temperature
- Very good filter basket
- Has a double boiler so it can make coffee and froth milk at the same time
- Very even coffee temperature when making consecutive cups of coffee

Bad points
- Only OK taste test score
- The water level in the tank is not particularly easy to see

70%
Map Bella

Good points
- Programmable coffee delivery
- Used capsules are easy to remove
- Can also be used with Expressi capsules

Bad points
- Only OK taste test score
- Small water tank

74%
DeLonghi Lattissima+ EN520.S

Good points
- Automatic power turn-off
- Programmable coffee delivery
- Used capsules are easy to remove

Bad points
- Only OK taste test score
- Small water tank

OTHER WHAT TO BUYS

These models from our previous tests all scored 70% or higher; see the table (left) for more details.

Sunbeam Café Latte EM5600	$329
Breville Fresca BES860	$800
Sunbeam Café Espresso EM3800	$199
DeLonghi Nespresso Essenza EN95R	$379
Rancilio Miss Silvia 09	$790

ABOUT THE REST

The other newly tested models are let down by their coffee-making performance. The **Breville Professional** has all the features at a reasonable price, while the **Expobar** is the most expensive machine on test and performs excellently for temperature consistency and milk frothing. The **DeLonghi Icona**, **Sunbeam Piccolo Espresso** and **La Pavoni** are excellent for temperature consistency, while the **Sunbeam Café Crema** and **Expressi** are very good for this. The Expressi is also very good for ease of use like all the other capsule machines on test. ■

Reality check

When you dish up the details on the way you wash, we listen and respond, says **Matthew Steen**

CHOICE dishwasher testing is based on the Australian standard, but sometimes this doesn't cover how you actually use your machines. Where the standard calls for a full place setting, for example, it doesn't take into account any plastic ware or pots.

Program selection, load patterns, level of soiling, detergents and contents all differ from household to household and from load to load. We can't test all variations, so we ask you to tell us about how you use your machine and what you expect from your dishwasher. This helps guide our test methods so that they reflect what you need, rather than what the manufacturers want you to have. To get the most from your membership, when you see a survey from us in your inbox, please take the time to fill it out so we can adapt our methods and tailor our testing to your needs.

In a push to snag the best star rating, some manufacturers are increasing their load capacity without much change to the actual size of the dishwasher cabinet. In some cases, improvements to the design of the dishwasher and test program can partially compensate for this. But when combined with the lower water usage, performance is sacrificed in many circumstances.

We always recommend you check wash performance first (see table, page 54), and then our reliability ratings, when deciding what to buy.

Nutshell

- *Finding out how and what you wash refines how we test dishwashers.*
- *Manufacturers are using sneaky tricks to earn high energy star ratings.*

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Easy-to-lift height-adjustable top basket An easy-adjust system means you can adjust the basket without removing it.

Fold-down/ removable plate racks help when loading awkward items. An **anti-flood hose** has an electric cut-off near the water tap connection, which means it stops leaks in the hose, not just in the machine.

Eco wash programs mostly save energy by washing at lower temperatures, and are ideal for use with enzyme-based detergents.

Half-load option is handy for washing a smaller load daily so the dishwasher doesn't get smelly.

Fast wash or **glasses programs** are suitable for lightly soiled dishes, or if you rinse first (which we don't believe you need to do).

Controls and labelling Look for engraved or etched labels on stainless steel so they don't come off when cleaning. Use a microfibre cloth or warm soapy water on bonded labelling.

A **concealed heating element** stops items being damaged if they fall through the basket – particularly plastics – and means food can't drop onto the element and cause a burning smell. All models on test have one.

Cutlery basket An anti-nesting grid helps stop the cutlery pieces from nesting, to enable a better wash. Look for a cutlery basket that can be placed anywhere in the bottom drawer.

Check your **normal dinnerware fits** into the dishwasher without crowding or hitting the spray arms. Take a few large dinner plates and tall glasses to the store, to check they both fit at the same time. Spin the spray arms to ensure they don't hit anything.

Cutlery trays are good for large utensils, and cutlery can be grouped on the tray as you load the machine, making unloading easier. They may be safer than standard cutlery baskets, reducing the risk of stabs from knives and forks. Machines with cutlery trays tend to have shorter heights between racks, which may be a problem if you have tall glasses and larger plates.

Reliability

Refer to page 34 for results of our latest reliability survey, or go to choice.com.au/appliancereliability

WHAT TO BUY

78%

Electrolux ESF66814XR

Good points

- Very good water efficiency
- Auto wash feature
- Excellent drying score
- Has fold-down tines
- Relatively quiet

Bad points

- Long cycle time
- No anti-flood hose
- No child lock controls
- Expensive to run

STANDARD

NEW **Electrolux** ESF66814XR	$1639
Green buy **Bosch** Classic Electronic SMS50E12AU/07	$1249
Dishlex DX301WK	$1009
LG LD-1419W2	$899
Miele G5141i	$1799

COMPACT

Bosch SKE53M05AU	$1199

SLIMLINE

AEG Electrolux Favorit F65411VI	$1639

The **LG LD-1419W2** washes well but has a very long running time. **AEG**, **Dishlex**, **Electrolux** and **LG** aren't as reliable as other What to Buy brands. For profiles of all dishwashers on test, plus similar models and those we couldn't include in the table (page 54), go to choice.com.au/dishwashers.

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		COSTS		PERFORMANCE										FEATURES	
		Price ($)*	Running cost ($/10 years)	Overall score (%)	Washing performance score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Drying performance score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Water used (L)	Energy used (kWh)	Noise (dB)	Cycle time (mins)	Auto program/ dirt sensor	Easy-to-lift, height-adjustable
STANDARD SIZE	**#Electrolux** ESF66814XR	1639	1354	78	76	87	91	62	13	1.57	39	152	✓	✓
	Bosch SMS50E12AU/07	1249	596	77	75	92	59	89	12	0.66	41	151		
	Dishlex DX301WK	1009	1376	77	80	67	92	62	21	1.57	48	114	✓	✓
	LG LD-1419W2	899	1290	77	76	71	95	66	23	1.45	42	173	✓	✓
	Miele G5141i	1799	1276	77	73	87	97	64	14	1.49	40	141	✓	✓
	Bosch SMS63M08AU	1749	949	76	67	92	93	76	12	1.10	37	125	✓	✓
	Dishlex DX103WK	739	1504	76	78	67	95	57	21	1.73	48	113		
	Dishlex DX203WK	849	1249	76	74	76	91	66	17	1.44	50	100		
	Miele G5300 SC	1899	1311	76	71	87	97	63	15	1.53	37	141	✓	✓
	Miele G5775 SCVi XXL	2599	1185	76	68	90	99	68	14	1.38	45	146	✓	✓
	#Smeg DWA157X	1499	982	76	73	93	74	75	12	1.14	48	163	✓	✓
	Miele G5500 SC	1999	1287	75	69	87	95	64	15	1.50	49	131	✓	✓
	Smeg STH903	2690	1051	75	69	87	87	72	13	1.22	52	110		na
	Westinghouse WSF6602WR	949	1391	75	74	78	91	61	18	1.61	45	115		✓
	AEG F88089MOP Favorit	2099	1344	74	69	87	93	62	14	1.58	35	154	✓	✓
	Bosch SMU68M05AU/01	1899	965	74	64	94	88	75	12	1.12	38	133	✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD60DCX6	1679	1055	74	66	81	97	73	15	1.20	47	110		na (B)
	Miele G4101i	1399	1517	74	74	74	94	57	21	1.75	43	144	✓	✓
	Smeg DWA149W	999	1364	74	69	83	92	62	16	1.57	46	123		✓
	V-Zug Adora 60SL	2990	1231	74	73	66	91	67	21	1.39	50	105	✓	✓
	Westinghouse WSU6603XR	1219	1410	74	72	80	88	60	17	1.64	43	146	✓	✓
	Ariston LFF825X	1499	1367	73	68	86	90	61	15	1.60	48	129		✓
	LG LD-1421T2	1349	1352	73	71	68	94	64	24	1.52	43	175	✓	✓
	Ariston LBF51	699	1445	72	70	83	84	58	16	1.69	49	138		✓
	#Asko D5644SS	1799	1441	72	71	82	78	59	17	1.65	49	162	✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD60DCW6	1479	1062	72	64	81	94	72	15	1.22	49	113		na (B)
	Fisher & Paykel DW60DOX1	1099	1279	72	69	86	78	64	15	1.49	36	147	✓	✓
	Indesit DFG261S	799	1268	72	66	84	89	65	16	1.47	44	133		✓
	Whirlpool ADP8000WH	649	720	72	67	90	57	84	11	0.82	47	132		✓
	Asko D5434 (A)	1299	1416	71	74	82	60	60	17	1.65	44	165	✓	
	DeLonghi DEDW60S	999	821	71	64	88	70	81	12	0.94	48	133		✓
	#Fisher & Paykel DW60CCW1	849	1332	71	68	79	80	64	19	1.51	54	130	✓	✓
	#Fisher & Paykel DW60CEW1	759	1197	71	63	90	88	67	13	1.39	52	121		✓
	#Siemens SX56T590AU/32	2299	1092	71	66	92	65	71	13	1.26	37	133	✓	✓
	Baumatic BAD6002	1289	730	70	61	79	78	83	16	0.88	53	135		✓
	#AEG F77000WOP Favorit	1099	1339	69	69	86	57	62	14	1.57	43	180	✓	✓
SLIMLINE/COMPACT	**Bosch** SKE53M05AU	1199	673	75	70	68	89	86	10	0.77	45	166	✓	na
	Bosch SCE53M05AU/01	1399	680	75	65	87	91	86	8	0.77	49	125	✓	
	AEG Electrolux F65411VI	1639	1357	74	76	57	94	62	19	1.56	51	114	✓	✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SDFTX6	1159	574	73	63	78	90	89	8	0.66	44	115		na (B)
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SCW6	849	1062	72	64	79	94	72	8	0.61	49	113		na (B)
	Omega DW101WA	499	443	70	69	76	42	94	9	0.49	46	109		na (B)
	Technika TDX4SS	599	622	70	59	79	83	88	11	0.70	52	99		✓
	Fisher & Paykel DD90SDFTX1	1469	767	69	58	82	85	83	11	0.88	48	115		na (B)

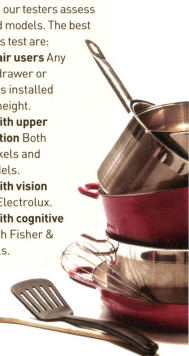
			SPECIFICATIONS								
plate racks	Anti-flood hose	Half-load option	Eco wash	Fast wash	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Water connection	Place settings	Type*	Colour*	Contact
			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C only	13	SI	SS	electrolux.com.au
✓	✓			✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 60	C rec	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	lge.com.au
✓			✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	SS	miele.com.au
✓	✓			✓	82 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
✓			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	FI	FI	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	15	FW	SS	smeg.com.au
✓			✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	W	miele.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	58 x 86 x 55	C only	12	FI	FI	smeg.com.au
			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 62	C only	13	FW	W	westinghouse.com.au
✓			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 60	C only	13	BI	SS	aegaustralia.com.au
✓	✓			✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	15	SI	SS	bosch.com.au
	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C rec	12	BI	SS	fp.com.au
✓			✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	SS	miele.com.au
✓			✓		85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	W	smeg.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 57	H or C	12	SI	SS	vzug.com
✓			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C only	13	BI	SS	westinghouse.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	aristonbrand.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 61 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	lge.com.au
			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	aristonbrand.com
			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	SI	SS	asko.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C rec	12	BI	W	fp.com.au
✓			✓ (C)	✓ (C)	82 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	SS	fp.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	arisit.com.au
✓	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 59	H or C	12	FW	W	whirlpool.com.au
			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	BI	W	asko.com.au
✓	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 58	H or C	12	FW	SS	delonghi.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	W	fp.com.au
			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	W	fp.com.au
✓	✓			✓	87 x 60 x 55	H or C	15	SI	SS	siemens-home.com.au
		✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	12	FW	W	baumatic.com.au
✓			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 63	C only	13	FW	W	aegaustralia.com.au
✓				✓	46 x 60 x 50	H or C	6	BI	SS	bosch.com.au
✓				✓	60 x 60 x 48	C rec	8	BI	SS	bosch.com.au
✓			✓	✓	82 x 45 x 55	C rec	9	FI	FI	aeg-electrolux.com.au
			✓	✓	48 x 60 x 57	C rec	6	BI	SS	fp.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	41 x 60 x 57	C rec	6	BI	W	fp.com.au
				✓	44 x 55 x 50	H or C	6	FW	W	omegaappliances.com.au
		✓		✓	85 x 45 x 58	H or C	8	FW	SS	technika.com.au
			✓	✓	48 x 90 x 58	C rec	9	SI	SS	fp.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of washing performance (55%), water efficiency (15%), drying performance (15%) and energy efficiency (15%). **Noise** is measured 1m away and 1m up from the dishwasher, which is placed within cabinetry. The noise level varies depending on kitchen layout, but our reading gives a comparative measure. A difference of 3dB is noticeable to the human ear. **Features** See What to Look For, page 52. **Water connection: H or C** You can connect the dishwasher to hot or cold water. Connecting to hot water is likely to shorten the cycle time, but you may lose program versatility. You may need a tempering valve to connect to solar hot water, as the inlet temperature generally should not exceed 60°C. **C rec** The manufacturer recommends connecting to a cold tap, and the dishwasher heats the water itself (all dishwashers have a heater).
C only You can only connect the dishwasher to a cold tap.
Type: FW Freestanding, with a worktop (can generally be inbuilt as well). **BI** Built-in – might not have top or side panels; must be enclosed and anchored to prevent it from tipping forward when fully loaded and dish racks are pulled out.
SI Semi-integrated – a built-in type for which you can fit a panel to the door under the control fascia to match the rest of your kitchen cupboard doors. **FI** Fully integrated – built-in with the whole front matching your kitchen and the controls inside the door. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much the dishwasher will cost over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash a full load every day using a normal or auto-sensing cycle, based on 22c/kWh for electricity and $1.50 per 1000L water. The largest running cost will be the cost of detergent, which can vary significantly, so it's not factored in these calculations. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2012. **TABLE NOTES #** Newly tested model.
***** Where possible, we've listed the white model code and price. Most models are available in other colours, finishes or types – usually at a higher price. The colour given for SI models is for the control panel. **SS** Indicates any metallic or metallic-look finish; not all models are actually stainless steel. **na** Not applicable – only has one drawer or basket, or in the case of the Fisher & Paykel Double DishDrawer DD60DCW6, two separate drawers. **(A)** Since its release in April 2011, Asko has replaced the auto program with daily, which may have different performance characteristics than auto.
(B) Has height-adjustable cup racks. **(C)** Cannot be selected by user – wash cycle is chosen by auto-sensing program.

Accessibility

Using Independent Living Centre guidelines, our testers assess the newly tested models. The best options from this test are:

- **For wheelchair users** Any of the single drawer or compact types installed at a suitable height.
- **For people with upper limb dysfunction** Both Fisher & Paykels and the Asko models.
- **For people with vision impairment** Electrolux.
- **For people with cognitive disability** Both Fisher & Paykel models.



Some like it hot

Cheaper ovens may not have all the extra functions but they still perform well, says **Rebecca Gatto**

CHOICE usually tests multi-function ovens priced over $1000. However, sales data tells us that cheaper ovens are high-sellers, so we've included some in this round of testing.

These models lack some of the functions that multi-function ovens offer, such as fan assist and top and bottom elements. However, we found they perform well and recommend the Chef EOC627W and Westinghouse POR663S (which retails for $1099 but we found for $690) as good ovens at a reasonable price. The Belling BI60MFS is also priced below $1000 but comes with many functions. Although its ease of use score puts it towards the bottom of the table (page 58), its oven performance is excellent and it also grills well.

When it comes to heating your oven, you're likely to get the most use out of the fan-forced function. Heat is generated from an element at the back of the oven, and a fan surrounding that element circulates the heat. With this function you'll find the oven heats quickly and generally distributes heat quite evenly. It's ideal for baking dishes such as roasts, cakes, casseroles and multiple-shelf cooking.

Another useful function if you often cook single-tray items such as biscuits, pies and custard tarts is the top and bottom element. This function tends to be hotter towards the top, so it's great for browning and base cooking. The grill element is useful for foods that require short cooking times (such as melting cheese on toast) and fan grill for cooking larger cuts of meat, chicken pieces or fish. The bottom element with fan is useful for foods that require a crisp base such as pastries and pizza.

In this test, our home economist, Fiona Mair, put new 10 ovens through a gruelling range of tests – cooking scones, toast, sausages, chicken, pizza, custard tart and meringues. All models on test perform well and are worth considering. Ease of use and cleaning are their main points of difference (see About the Rest, right).

Nutshell

- All ovens on test are good, very good or excellent overall; ease of use is what sets them apart.
- In this test we include some models priced below $1000 and find they perform well.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Smeg SA 304X8** has small dial controls with hard-edged cross bars. Its grill rack doesn't roll out smoothly and there is poor visibility through the door. It's fairly easy to clean, and a vapor cleaning function also helps remove baked-on grease.

The **Chef** has no smokeless grill tray, and although it has no cleaning function, enamel surfaces and moulded shelf supports make cleaning easier. The white exterior surface is also easy to clean.

The **Siemens** has excellent coverage of catalytic liners, a smokeless grill tray and three sets of telescopic runners. The shield over the grill element doesn't protect hands well and baked-on grease can require some effort to clean.

WHAT TO BUY

91%
Electrolux EPEE63CS, $2639

Good points
- Excellent for base and multi-shelf cooking, roasting, low temperature oven cooking and fan grilling
- Good for grilling and turn-down ability
- Controls are easy to use
- Grill trays roll out smoothly with a stopper
- Easy to clean
- The grill element can be lowered for cleaning
- Default temperature for functions

Bad points
- Digital display is not very bright
- Some members have told us this model and its double oven equivalent have trouble reaching and maintaining set temperatures, but we didn't find this with the sample on test

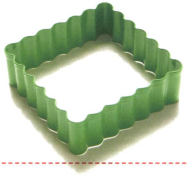
Note: We tested the previous EPEE63AS model. This new model has telescopic runners, racking system and a roasting dish. Changes may affect ease of use slightly, but not cooking performance.

91%
Westinghouse POR883S, $2119

Good points
- Excellent for base cooking, roasting, low temperature oven cooking and grilling
- Very good for grilling and multi-shelf oven cooking
- Excellent for ease of use
- Shield over grill element
- Easy to clean
- Grill element can be lowered for cleaning
- Default temperature for functions

Bad points
- None to mention

Note: We tested a previous variant of the POP883S model; this new variant has a cooler door. Changes may slightly affect cooking performance and running costs.



The **Westinghouse POR663S** has only faint labelling on its controls. Its grill area is excellent with a grill rack that rolls out smoothly. It has no cleaning function, but enamel surfaces and fingerprint-resistant stainless steel makes cleaning easier.

The **Miele H 4810 B CleanSteel** has very good controls and is easy to clean, but its grill tray has no stopper and there is no protective shield in front of the grill element. The trays move out loosely and can be pulled out too far. They also have a raised bar at the front, so sliding out heavy dishes can be difficult.

The **Omega OO612XN** beeps when the oven has preheated. Its grill area is excellent, with a rack that rolls out smoothly on a telescopic runner. There are another two telescopic runners for the oven shelves, without which the oven fails the shelf tilt test on the middle shelf. It's very good for cleaning, with catalytic liners on the side and back walls.

The **Baumatic BO6FS** has no smokeless grill tray, poor internal lighting and fails the tilt test on the middle shelf. It has no cleaning function but the moulded shelf supports are easy to clean. The grill element doesn't drop down so cleaning the oven ceiling is difficult.

The **Fisher & Paykel OB 60SCEX3** has faint labelling on the controls. It doesn't have a smokeless grill tray or a protective shield over the grill element. The stainless steel exterior leaves finger marks, requiring more cleaning effort. It has catalytic liners on the side walls only and is difficult to clean around the fan.

The **Belling** fails the tilt test on the top shelf with a risk of the shelf popping out of position. It doesn't have a smokeless grill tray and the trays only support a small load due to narrow shelf depth. The stainless steel exterior requires extra effort to clean.

The **Euromaid** has controls with small labelling and no temperature grading. It doesn't have a smokeless grill tray and the grill element has no protective shield. There's poor visibility of food on the top shelf. The oven shelves have a raised bar so sliding out heavy dishes can be difficult. It has catalytic liners, and the stainless steel exterior means more effort to clean.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Useable space Take your largest baking dish with you to the store. Differing interpretations of the international standard means claimed useable volumes between manufacturers are not comparable. We measure from the oven floor to the grill element, side-wall to side-wall, and the rear wall to the door.

Catalytic liners work by absorbing fat splatters. You need to regularly heat the oven to 250°C for an hour to burn off the splatters and, when cool, wipe them with a damp cloth. These liners may eventually need replacing.

Pyrolytic cleaning automatically locks the oven door and heats it to about 500°C. This turns food residue to ash, which you wipe away once the oven has cooled. The glass door interior must be cleaned manually first, and shelves and supports must be removed and cleaned separately.

Telescopic shelf runners help keep the shelf stable.

The **grill tray** with a safety stop should slide in and out easily and allow you to place food at the back.

A **smokeless grill tray** traps fat and grease below it; without one, splattering and smoking fat can be messy.

The **grill element** should be set high into the ceiling or have a shield so it can't be accidentally touched.

A **stainless steel exterior** that is fingerprint-resistant will save valuable time when it comes to cleaning. ■

Shelves should have safety stops to prevent them from being pulled out accidentally, and should not tilt when pulled out and with a load.

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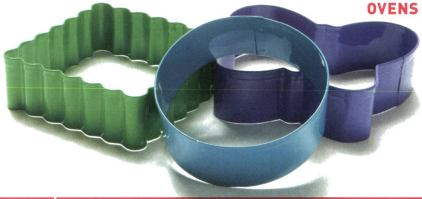
	COSTS		PERFORM
	Price ($)	Running costs ($)	Overall score (%)
Electrolux EPEE63CS (A)	2639	266	91
Westinghouse POR883S (A)	2119	268	91
Fisher & Paykel OB60S9DEP	2199	327	86
Miele H 5241 BP (B)	3499	269	85
Smeg SAP109M-8	2890	299	84
Bosch HBA63B450A	1999	270	83
Fisher & Paykel OB60SCMX3	899	328	83
# **Chef** EOC627W	709	262	82
Neff B46W74N0GB	3999	264	82
Omega OO651XN	799	261	82
# **Smeg** SA 304X8	1690	249	82
Bosch HBA73B550A	2299	219	81
Miele H 5240 B	1999	241	81
# **Miele** H 4810 B CleanSteel	1999	277	81
# **Omega** OO 612XN	1499	256	80
# **Siemens** HB43AU550A	2399	250	80
# **Westinghouse** POR663S	1009	233	80
Blanco OE606X	1349	248	79
# **Baumatic** BO6FS	769	226	78
DeLonghi DE60PYROS	2099	332	78
# **Fisher & Paykel** OB 60SCEX3	1049	290	78
# **Belling** BI60MFS	849	280	76
AEG-Electrolux B5741-5-M	2429	228	75
Baumatic BO67MS	1179	239	75
St George 8500200PS (C)	2999	289	75
# **Euromaid** 8 Multifunction oven MS8	1029	228	74

USING THE TABLE How we test Refer to choice.com.au/ovens. What to Look For. **Running costs** are based on running the oven at top and bottom elements (convection or traditional bake) are used. **Price** similar and will perform the same, but it doesn't have the pyrolytic featu

When it comes to heating your oven, you're likely to get the most use out of the fan-forced function



		FEATURES & FUNCTIONS										SPECIFICATIONS				
Oven score (%)	Grill score (%)	Pyrolytic function	Catalytic liners	Telescopic runners	Smokeless grill tray	Clock	Fan grill	Grill	Bottom and fan or fan assist	Top and bottom	Fan forced	Claimed external dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Claimed cut-out dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Internal dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Measured internal volume (L)	Contact
91	88	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	595 x 595 x 573	600 x 600 x 581 (flush) 590 x 568 x 560 (proud)	370 x 475 x 425	75	electrolux.com.au
88	90	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	595 x 595 x 545	600 x 600 x 581 (flush) 590 x 565 x 560 (proud)	370 x 480 x 415	74	westinghouse.com.au
88	100	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 595 x 567	585 x 560-600 x 550	325 x 440 x 420	60	fisherpaykel.com.au
95	88	✓		(D)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	596 x 595 x 547	600 x 560-568 x 550	390 x 470 x 410	75	miele.com.au
85	98	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 597 x 548	585 x 564 x 500	380 x 470 x 390	70	smeg.com.au
88	88	✓		(D)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	595 x 595 x 548	575-597 x 560 x 550	325 x 475 x 410	63	bosch.com.au
95	90		(D)	(D)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		597 x 595 x 567	585 x 560-600 x 550	325 x 440 x 420	60	fisherpaykel.com.au
85	80							✓			✓	595 x 595 x 567	590 x 565 x 560	290 x 460 x 430	57	electrolux.com.au
84	83		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	595 x 595 x 548	587 x 600 x 550	320 x 475 x 644	64	neff.com.au
83	78						✓	✓			✓	594 x 594 x 540	589 x 600 x 550	330 x 440 x 385	56	hagemeyerappliances.com.au
93	88						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 597 x 548	585 x 564 x 500	320 x 400 x 420	54	smeg.com.au
84	88	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	595 x 595 x 548	575-597 x 560 x 550	325 x 475 x 410	63	bosch.com.au
91	88		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	596 x 595 x 547	595 x 560-568 x 550	390 x 470 x 410	75	miele.com.au
95	80		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	578 x 595 x 546	586 x 600 x 550	360x 415 x 420	63	miele.com.au
88	73		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 594 x 535	595 x 560 x 500	330 x 430 x 400	57	hagemeyerappliances.com.au
85	83		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	595 x 595 x 548	600 x 560 x 550	320 x 400 x 420	54	bosch.com.au
87	75				✓		✓	✓			✓	595 x 596 x 568	590 x 565 x 560	315 x 450 x 420	60	electrolux.com.au
85	73					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 598 x 522	575 x 560 x 480	350 x 465 x 385	63	hagemeyerappliances.com.au
83	78						✓	✓			✓	594 x 598 x 566	585 x 560 x 560	340 x 460 x 390	61	thinkappliances.com.au
85	80	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	594 x 594 x 560	591 x 560 x 550	350 x 425 x 400	60	delonghi.com.au
86	80		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	597 x 595 x 567	585 x 560 x 545	280 x 410 x 420	48	fisherandpaykel.com.au
92	75					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	585 x 595 x 550	590 x 560 x 550	330 x 450 x 385	58	belling.com.au
85	70	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	594 x 594 x 567	590 x 560 x 530	345 x 440 x 390	59	electrolux.com.au
81	90		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	601 x 598 x 565	600 x 560 x 560	370 x 460 x 390	66	thinkappliances.com.au
91	73						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	620 x 597 x 585	623 x 600 x 590 (flush) 618 x 570 x 565 (proud)	400 x 480 x 400	77	sga.com.au
85	75		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	595 x 594 x 567	590 x 560 x 550	310 x 430 x 420	56	euromaid.com.au

res The overall score is made up of ease of use (40%), oven score (30%) and grill score (30%). **Features** See What to Look For, opposite. **Measured internal volume** See "useable space" under °C for one hour a day, three times per week for 10 years at 22c/kWh. Where available, the fan-forced function is used; if not, the fan assist is used, and for models that don't have this function, the ommended retail, as of February 2012. **TABLE NOTES #** Newly tested model. **(A)** See note in What to Buy profiles, page 57, about model numbers. **(B)** The Miele H 5241B ($2499) is technically ase of use may differ slightly. **(C)** The model has a steam clean function. **(D)** Available as an optional extra.

Hot topic

Effective as they are, unflued gas heaters won't suit every household, says **Chris Barnes**

Nutshell

➤ *Because they vent their emissions back into the room, unflued gas heaters can't be used in bedrooms and may not suit people with asthma or other respiratory problems.*

Unflued gas heaters are generally fast and energy-efficient room heaters. They're more expensive to buy than electric heaters, but cost less to run and so are worth considering.

However, like all gas heaters these models produce emissions, including carbon monoxide and nitrous oxide. Because they have no flue to vent the emissions outside, the gases are vented into the room. Emissions are at relatively low levels – the Australian standard is tough in this respect – but unflued gas heaters can't legally be installed or used in bedrooms, bathrooms or small, poorly ventilated areas, and aren't a good choice for asthmatics or people with respiratory problems. Water vapour from combustion may also condense on walls and ceilings and cause mould.

These issues have led to a debate about gas heater use in schools, with many arguing that they should be replaced with flued models to improve classroom air quality.

For full details, including how we test gas heaters, go to **choice.com.au/gasheaters**

WHAT TO BUY
13-15 MEGAJOULES/HOUR

Rinnai Dynamo 15

Type Convector
Minimum room size 16m² with a 2.4m high ceiling

Good points

- Fast to heat room and good room heat distribution
- Easy-to-program timer
- Portable and lightweight
- Thermostat, remote control and child lock

Bad points

- None to mention

			PERFORMANCE					FEATURES			
		Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby power score (%)	Remote control	Timer	Child lock	Heat settings
13-15 MJ/HR	**Rinnai** Dynamo 15	1099	72	71	83	54	✓	✓	✓	Thermostat
	Rinnai Enduro 13	931	64	63	72	54		✓	✓	Thermostat
	Rinnai Titan 151	772	62	53	73	100				Low, high
	Everdure Lancer	799	61	52	75	100				Low, high
	#Paloma PJC-W13FN	849	58	51	80	65	✓			Thermostat
18-21 MJ/HR	**#Paloma** PJC-W18FRN	999	71	70	71	78	✓	✓	✓	Thermostat
	Rinnai Capella 18 Plus (A)	1299	71/70	77/76	71	28	✓	✓	✓	Thermostat
	Companion Supaheat Comp 732	499	55	40	85	100				Variable (slider)
25 MJ/HR	**Rinnai** Granada 252	999	79	81	68	83				Low, medium, high
	#Paloma PJC-W25FRN	1099	76	77	71	79	✓	✓	✓	Thermostat
	#Rinnai Avenger 25	1200	76	76	73	83	✓	✓	✓	Thermostat
	Everdure Brigadier	899	76	75	65	100				Low, medium, high
	Rinnai Avenger 25 Plus (A)	1299	75/73	82/79	71	33	✓	✓	✓	Thermostat

18-21 MEGAJOULES/HOUR

$999

Paloma PJC-W18FRN

Type Convector
Minimum room size 19m² with a 2.4m high ceiling

Good points

- Very good room heat distribution
- Very good standby energy score
- Economy mode
- Thermostat, remote control and child lock

Bad points

- Timer is tricky to program

$1299

Rinnai Capella 18 Plus

Type Convector with additional electric heating element
Minimum room size 19m² with a 2.4m high ceiling

Good points

- Fast to heat room and good room heat distribution
- Thermostat, timer, remote control and child lock
- Electric element for extra heat capacity

Bad points

- Poor standby power score

25 MEGAJOULES/HOUR

$999

Rinnai Granada 252

Type Radiant convector
Minimum room size 52m² with a 2.4m high ceiling

Good points

- Very fast to heat room and very good room heat distribution

Bad points

- No thermostat, timer, remote control or child lock
- Needs much larger minimum room size than models with a thermostat
- Exposed heating element

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CIFICATIONS

Claimed maximum room size (m², cool climate)	Required minimum room size (m²)	Measured dimensions (cm, W x H x D)*	Weight (kg)**	Length of power cord / gas hose (m)***	Type	Contact
52	16	48 x 50 x 24	10.1	1.9 / 1.5	Convector	rinnai.com.au
45	14	48 x 50 x 24	10.1	2.0 / 1.5	Convector	rinnai.com.au
46	31	62 x 55 x 19	15.0	1.9 / 1.5	Radiant convector	rinnai.com.au
ns	31	61 x 57 x 23	16.7	1.7 / 1.5	Radiant convector	everdure.com.au
52	14	53 x 44 x 21	10.9	1.8 / 1.6	Convector	raypak.com.au
70	19	53 x 50 x 25	13.4	1.8 / 1.6	Convector	raypak.com.au
89	19	61 x 57 x 24	18.3	2.0 / 1.5	Convector	rinnai.com.au
44	44	72 x 57 x 28	11.3	(B) / 1.4	Radiant convector	bromic.com.au
76	52	62 x 54 x 23	15.9	2.0 / 1.5	Radiant convector	rinnai.com.au
97	26	53 x 50 x 25	13.7	3.0 / 2.9	Convector	raypak.com.au
ns	26	61 x 48 x 24	12.3	2.0 / 1.6	Convector	rinnai.com.au
90	52	80 x 57 x 29	21.0	1.7 / 1.5	Radiant convector	everdure.com.au
113	26	61 x 57 x 24	18.6	3.0 / 3.0	Convector	rinnai.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of performance (70%), ease of use (20%) and standby power score (10%). **Star rating** is out of six. **Room sizes** For a ceiling height of 2.4m. The minimum room size is a legal requirement. Some states have further restrictions for the use of this heater type – check with a gas plumber or retailer. **Price** Recommended or average retail, as of March 2012. **TABLE NOTES ns** Newly tested. * Rounded to the nearest cm. ** Including gas hose and electric cord. *** Rounded to the nearest 10cm. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** The first score is when using the additional electric heating element; the second score is without it. **(B)** No power cord.

ABOUT THE REST

Models with lower scores are generally slower to heat up a room or don't heat it evenly. The lowest scoring model, the **Companion**, failed to raise our test room temperature by 10°C and also did not evenly heat the room. ■

Safety first

- **Use the heater according to the manufacturer's instructions** and your state's safety requirements. Gas bayonet points must be installed by a qualified tradesperson.
- **Ensure the room is well ventilated** – e.g. open doors to adjacent rooms, install vents, or (as a last resort) leave a window slightly open.
- **Have the heater serviced according to the manufacturer's recommendations**. A faulty or badly maintained heater can have dangerously high emissions.

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Don't wanna miss a thing

Chris Ruggles guides you through the maze of choices now available for recording your favourite TV shows

We've been recording our favourite TV programs since the mid 1970s. Whether Betamax or VHS, it wasn't always a simple procedure, with many people finding the process of setting clocks accurately and programming their VCR a real challenge. However, by the time CHOICE tested VCRs for the last time back in 2002, most were getting OK or better scores for ease of use.

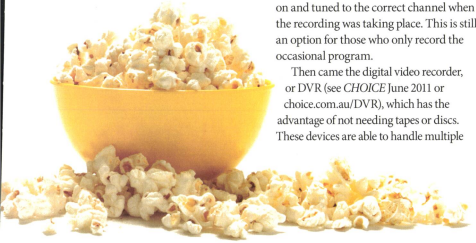
The arrival of the digital age signalled the introduction of recordable DVDs. Sadly, manufacturers couldn't make them simple, and they were of different types (R+, R-, RW+, RW- and DVD RAM) with one or two layers.

Then, along came the change from analog to digital TV. Now, not only did you have to set up your analog VCR or DVD recorder to record using the often-inaccurate paper TV guide, if you used a separate digital set-top box (STB) you also had to make sure the box was going to be on and tuned to the correct channel when the recording was taking place. This is still an option for those who only record the occasional program.

Then came the digital video recorder, or DVR (see *CHOICE* June 2011 or choice.com.au/DVR), which has the advantage of not needing tapes or discs. These devices are able to handle multiple concurrent recordings, allowing quite complex and clever setting up for future recordings, time shifting in real time or the ability to record one or two programs and play back one you've pre-recorded at the same time. Some, such as TiVo and Foxtel iQ2, will even make predictive selections for you based on your viewing preferences. But their greatest advantages are picture and sound quality without any degradation, as well as large amounts of storage space.

Nutshell

- *There are lots of options for recording TV, but not all are easy to use.*
- *If you rarely miss a program, an online catch-up service may be all you need.*
- *The DVR remains your best option – for now – if you record lots of shows and often.*



The here and now

If you prefer to watch shows on your computer rather than on a TV, a USB TV tuner is a good option. They're small, relatively inexpensive and usually come with an electronic program guide (EPG) and software that allows you to program a recording. You can then watch on the computer screen or, if you have a TV that connects to your network, stream the video to the TV.

A new device recently introduced to the market combines the portability of USB or flash memory storage with the processing power of modern TVs. Many TVs sold last year – and no doubt many more in 2012 – come with the interface and software necessary for programming recordings, but require you to supply either a USB device (such as a hard drive or USB stick) or an SD card. The advantage is you don't need a separate device for recording programs, but the drawback is that almost all TVs with this feature currently only have one digital tuner. This means you have to watch what you're recording, switch to another input if the TV will let you (most don't) or do something else while the program is being recorded.

Many new TVs have an ethernet port, allowing you to connect the TV directly to the internet and therefore to video delivery services such as MUBI or BigPond Movies, which let you stream movies directly to the TV – for a price. Or, you could use a similar service, such as Fetch TV, that includes a dedicated recorder so you can store the movie to watch later.

You may decide not to record at all and rely entirely on free catch-up services such as the ABC's iView website. Most commercial networks have similar offerings, and they're really handy if all you need to do is catch an episode you've missed. However, most will only keep a program for a set period after it has been

PICK OF THE BOXES

The following products are our top-performing recording devices and TVs that record from previous tests.

TVs THAT RECORD

- 80cm – Panasonic TH-L32DT30A, $1399
- 106cm – Panasonic TH-L42E30A, $1199
- 127cm – Samsung PS51D8000, $2599
- 139cm – Panasonic TH-P55ST30A, $2599

See *CHOICE* Dec '10/Jan '11

DVRs

- Topfield TRF-2400, $649
- TiVo 320, $499
- Foxtel iQ2, subscription only

See *CHOICE* Jun 2010

HD SET-TOP BOXES

(with recording to USB function)

- Digitel HD3300, $79

See *CHOICE* Nov 2011

USB TV TUNERS

- PCTV Nanostick, $94
- AV Labs AVL683LE, $40
- Elgato DTT DVB-T Freeview TNT TDT, $127
- MyGica DVBT Mini TV Stick, $34
- Leadtek DTV Dongle Gold, $50

See *Computer CHOICE* Sep/Oct 2008

broadcast. An alternative is the almost inexhaustible supply of video on YouTube and similar sites, which varies dramatically in quality but is always available.

All these options will change as manufacturers pack more features into the TV or associated devices, but for now the DVR remains your most versatile option for free-to-air recording.

EPGs

TV networks plan their programs many months in advance. However, they may add or delete some programs quite late, depending on negotiations for broadcast rights. Each network's programmer creates a document that is sent to an aggregator.

These documents vary in format and detail, and the aggregator compiles them into a single data set and adds details such as parental guidance ratings, series links, cast lists and even program descriptions where necessary. This data is then sent back to the network in a form that's ready for display. The networks or other EPG providers, such as Foxtel and TiVo, decide how often they'll update the information that's broadcast.

The EPG data is broadcast to your DVR, set-top box or TV as part of the individual network's data stream (called a multiplex), and is specific to that network. Your digital device has to separate the EPG data from the actual program data, then compile all the programming information for each network and each channel within that network and present the information for all the networks on a single screen. This is why it can sometimes take a while for the EPG to update when you switch to it. Some devices may even require you to switch to the channel you're interested in to get an update.

Devices with the Freeview EPG sticker can use the Freeview EPG, which gets all the data in one stream so you don't have to change channel to update the data. However, these devices come with restrictions on your ability to skip forward and which shows you can record.

An EPG is only ever as good as the data that's broadcast, and as a general rule it's OK. However, we've seen a number of errors and omissions on both free-to-air and TiVo EPGs. It's worth adding some time to the beginning and end of a recording to make sure you capture the entire program.

50+%

The percentage of TVs sold to July 2011 that had an EPG

82%

The approximate percentage of Australian households that have converted to digital TV

HD or SD?

In broadcast terms, HD means anything from 576 pixels on the short side of the image to 1080 pixels. Make sure your recording device has an HD digital tuner, because networks are likely to increase the number of channels to segment their markets and you may find programs you want to watch are on HD channels in the future (*Neighbours* moving from Channel 10 to 11 last year is one example).

This doesn't necessarily mean the broadcast will be in an HD format. Increasingly, we're seeing supposed HD channels broadcasting at SD resolutions to save bandwidth, which allows a network to have more channels. The upside is more programs to choose from; the downside is your TV will have to upscale the broadcast to its native resolution, which may result in reduced picture quality. ■

The docks that rock

Price is no guarantee of quality when it comes to iPod docks, says **Chris Ruggles**

Nutshell

- *Only a third of the units on test impress us overall.*
- *Some can be used as a sound system for a flat, but most will struggle if you turn them up.*

In our latest round of iPod dock testing, we found that apart from our recommended models (opposite), sound quality in most cases is only OK or borderline. This means that while they're not too hard on the ears, they may lack depth or bass, sound mono and thin or have some noticeable distortion. These and other faults are not major in themselves, but they can add up to a less than optimal listening experience. You can expect those that score good or better to work well as a sound system for a small flat or medium-sized room. The others will struggle at high volume settings.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

An **iPad dock** should have the required space to fit an iPad without it falling off. The **remote control** should be easy to read, with large, well-spaced buttons and clear labels.

FM, digital (DAB+) or internet radio Digital radio is currently only available in Australia in major cities. Internet radio gives you access to channels from all over the world.

Auxiliary input connection allows you to use the dock with other music players and products, such as computers, CD, DVD and even tape players.

Apple AirPlay allows you to stream music from any device that has this function built-in.

Video out allows you to play videos from your iPod on a TV.

Bluetooth or Wi-Fi inputs may make it possible to use your iPod as a remote control and will free you from having to dock before playing music.

Line-in/USB/auxiliary connection allows access for external devices such as an MP3 player or laptop. USB inputs come in different shapes and sizes, and some will only be useful for software upgrades (Grundig and JBL in this test).

Battery The ability to run on batteries is useful for extra portability, but don't expect them to last long if you turn up the volume. Backup batteries for the clock are a good idea in case the mains power fails.

Stereo outputs allow you to connect the dock to a more powerful sound system for better sound quality.

WHAT TO BUY

77%
Sony Premium Speaker Dock RDP-X500iP

Good points
- Good sound
- Good on-board controls
- Remote is very easy to use
- Can dock an iPad
- Excellent standby energy use

Bad points
- Awkward to carry

74%
Monster Beats by Dr Dre Beatbox

Good points
- Good sound
- Remote is easy to use
- Very good standby energy use

Bad points
- Relatively bulky and heavy

72%
Philips Fidelio Docking Speaker DS9/10

Good points
- Good sound
- Good ease of use for the remote control
- Can dock an iPad
- Can function as an alarm clock after installing a free app
- Wi-Fi available as an optional extra

Bad points
- No way to turn unit off if "aux in" is selected
- Relatively bulky and heavy

70%
AktiMate Micro

Good points
- Best performer in the listening test
- The speakers can be separated for better stereo effect

Bad points
- No remote control
- Cabling required between speakers
- Banana plugs need to be attached to the cables before the speakers can be wired
- Awkward to carry
- No standby function

70%
Conran Audio Speaker Dock for iPod and iPhone CA 0070

Good points
- Good sound
- Remote is easy to use
- Bluetooth 2.0

Bad points
- Awkward access to ports for other inputs

70%
Yamaha TSX-120 Desktop Audio System

Good points
- Good sound
- Excellent manual
- Very good access to other input ports
- Good on-board controls
- Remote is very easy to use
- FM, digital (DAB+) radio
- Can function as an alarm clock

Bad points
- Very poor standby energy use

About the rest

The **Pure** has good sound and is easy to use, but misses out on being recommended because of its poor standby energy score.

The **Teac** is easy to use and can function as a clock radio, but our panel found its sound muddy with techno tracks and boomy with classical music.

Apart from our recommended models, sound quality in most cases is only OK or borderline

The **Bose** is small, light and relatively easy to use, with a rechargeable battery that makes it handy should you want to carry it about. You can't have an iPod docked (that is for charging) if you want to listen via the auxiliary input. The sound quality is OK, but our listening panel found it a bit muddy and lacking bass on some tracks.

The **Kicker** is one of the larger, heavier docks on test. Its sound is muddy and lacks depth, but has quite a bit of bass. However, it's easy to use and has a composite video output.

The **Creative** uses an iPod as a remote via Bluetooth wireless connection. It struggles to produce clear sound at high frequencies and lacks drama down low, but is relatively light and inexpensive.

The **Geneva Sound System** has an odd-sounding widening effect and the high frequencies are harsh at times, but it's easy to use.

The **Pioneer** is easy to use with lots of features, but our panel found it lacks bass for techno tracks, is harsh with rock and sounds dull with classical music.

The **Harman Kardon** can run on batteries (eight D cells), which aren't supplied and would add to its weight significantly. Its remote control keys can have different functions in different modes and there is no indication as to which mode you are in, which can be confusing. Also, it will play from two sources at once if both are turned on. Our panel thought it sounded a bit muddy.

The **Bowers & Wilkins** is relatively easy to use and has a two-year warranty. Our panel found it harsh with rock and techno tracks and it lacks presence with classical music. Although its remote control has small buttons and labelling, it's easy to use and has good on-board controls.

The **Grundig** has lots of features and is easy to use. However, the cabling must be screwed into the speakers, which is tedious, but can easily be avoided by using banana plugs or something similar. Another drawback is the power plug is so large it inhibits the use of power points

		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES			
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby energy score (%)	DVD	iPad dock	Remote	FM radio
Sony Premium Speaker Dock RDP-X500iP	499	77	75	77	100		✓	✓	
Monster Beats by Dr Dre Beatbox	600	74	75	70	80			✓	
Philips Fidelio Docking Speaker DS9/10	399	72	75	66	60		✓	✓	
AktiMate Micro	385	70	85	40	0 (A)				
Conran Audio Speaker Dock for iPod and iPhone CA 0070	499	70	70	71	60			✓	
Yamaha TSX-120 Desktop Audio System	499	70	70	82	0			✓	✓
Pure Contour	399	69	70	76	20			✓	✓
Bose SoundDock Portable	549	61	60	69	40			✓	
Kicker iK501	280	60	55	72	60			✓	
Creative ZiiSound D5x	350	59	55	67	80			✓ (B)	
Geneva Sound System Model S	499	59	55	73	40		✓	✓	✓
Pioneer Slim AV Micro System X-SMC1-K	399	59	50	79	80	✓		✓	✓
Harman Kardon Go + Play II	499	58	55	61	80			✓	
Teac Stereo Compact Radio SR80iDAB	399	58	50	79	60			✓	✓
Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Mini	499	56	50	67	80			✓	
Grundig Trio Touch GMSX1000DABIP	549	56	50	77	40			✓	✓
Philips Fidelio Docking Speaker DS8550	300	56	50	74	40		✓	✓	
iHome iW1 with Apple AirPlay	500	53	50	73	0 (A)		✓	✓	
JBL OnAirWireless	399	47	45	63	0			✓	✓

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of performance (70%), ease of use (25%) and standby energy (5%). **Features** See What applicable. ** Including power lead, rounded to nearest 0.1kg. **na** Not applicable. **(A)** On/off switch at the back. **(B)** iPod acts as a remote via Bluetoo

A la mode

Standby energy is an issue with these products because they're likely to spend a significant part of their lives in this mode. Scores of 40% or less indicate the product will use more than one watt when in standby. However, the Aktimate and iHome score zero because they don't have any standby mode.

on either side if you're connecting via a power board. Our panel found it harsh with rock and techno tracks and dull with classical music.

The **Philips Fidelio Docking Speaker DS8550** is easy to use. You can download an app that will give you an alarm clock function as well. Our panel found it muddy with rock and techno tracks and dull with classical music.

The **iHome** is easy to use, however the dock is just a standard Apple connection cable, which means you'll need a surface where you can rest the iPod or iPad. It not only supports Apple AirPlay, but will also connect to internet radio with a $1.99 app, and there's a free app to add clock radio functions. It sits on a charger for the internal battery and we found it was difficult to find a stable position at times. Our panel found it a bit muddy with rock and techno and has an unnatural sound widening effect with classical music. The latter can be turned off, but the sound becomes thin and flat.

The **JBL**'s odd circular shape can make docking and undocking difficult. Our panel found it muddy with techno tracks; harsh with rock and sounds dull with classical music. Its power plug is large enough to inhibit the use of power points on either side if you're connecting via a power board. ■

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INPUTS							OUTPUTS			SPECIFICATIONS			
Internet radio	3.5mm aux	Stereo RCA aux	USB	LAN port (RJ45)	Bluetooth	Wi-Fi	Apple AirPlay	Headphones	Video	Stereo RCA	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Weight (kg)**	Display dimensions (mm, W x H)	Contact
	✓										17.5 x 40 x 19.5	3.3	na	sony.com.au
	✓										16.5 x 51 x 17	5.8	na	e-hifi.com.au
	✓										19 x 51 x 20.5	4.8	na	philips.com.au
	✓		1 x b								25 x 29 x 22.5	7.0	na	aktimate.com.au
	✓	✓	1 x mini b		2.0						23.5 x 28.5 x 12	2.5	na	conranaudio.com.au
	✓										12.5 x 35 x 27	3.8	91 x 14	au.yamaha.com
✓	✓		1 x mini b	1 (C)		✓		✓	Composite		23 x 37 x 22	3.0	62 x 24	pure.com
	✓										17 x 31 x 15.5	2.2	na	bose.com.au
	✓								Composite	✓	22 x 48.5 x 21.5	4.2	52 x 15	kicker.com
	✓				2.1 + Edr						10 x 43 x 13	2.5	na	au.creative.com
	✓										22 x 23.5 x 18.5 (D)	3.3 (D)	na	audiodynamics.com.au
	✓		1 x a		With adapter (extra)			✓	Composite, HDMI		22 x 52 x 17.5	3.9	na	pioneer.com.au
	✓		1 x b						S-video		25 x 48 x 22.5	4.0	na	e-hifi.com.au
		✓	1 x a						Composite		16.5 x 39 x 18	2.0	63 x 14	teac.com.au
	✓		1 x b								20 x 32 x 12.5	2.2	na	e-hifi.com.au
✓	✓		1 x mini b	1		✓		✓	Composite	✓	12.5 x 42 x 17	3.0	69 x 52	grundig.net.au
	✓				2.0						17.5 x 42 x 11	2.4	na	philips.com.au
	✓		1 x a			✓	✓				19 x 32 x 9.5	2.9	na	ihomeintl.com
	✓		1 x a			✓	✓				24 x 28 x 19.5	1.7	48 x 37	jbl.com

For, page 66. All iPod docks on test have iPod and AC power operation. **Price** Recommended retail, as of January 2012. **TABLE NOTES** * Rounded up to nearest 0.5cm, in open configuration if an adapter to USB, available at extra cost. **(D)** 15cm high and 3kg without stand.

Rest easy

A mandatory standard is helping make cots safer, says **Chris Barnes**

Cot safety has been consistently improving since the introduction of a mandatory safety standard back in 1998. We're now able to recommend or rate as worth considering most of the cots we test. Even those we don't recommend due to major safety failures can often be made safe with the right mattress – sometimes a manufacturer will recommend one that's too thick or not wide enough.

However, there are still failures that can lead to incidents such as a child climbing and falling from the cot, getting a limb or head trapped, or even suffocating. Only cots that meet all the safety requirements are recommended, and fortunately we've found plenty for you to choose from.

Nutshell

- CHOICE tests 12 new models and combines them with those still available from previous tests.
- Most cots these days are safe or can be made safe.

WHAT TO BUY

Newly tested models that pass all our safety tests are listed here. In addition, these recommended models from our earlier tests are still available: **Love N Care** Sereno, **Regent** Sherbrooke, **Tasman Eco** Capri and **Tasman Eco** Tuscany.

ABOUT THE REST

Three models on test have only minor failures. The **Boori** and **Leander** pose a possible finger entrapment hazard. The **Ikea**'s sides and ends aren't sufficiently rounded. These models also fail minor information requirements. The **Mothercare** also has some edges that aren't sufficiently rounded and isn't deep enough with the recommended 120mm-thick mattress. Mothercare is correcting this, but if you have one, use only a 100mm-thick mattress. The **Cheekybub's** recommended 740mm-wide mattress leaves a gap that a child could roll into face first.

Love N Care Regal

Good points
- Passes all safety tests*
- Converts to junior bed and sofa
- Large drawer

Bad points
- Fails minor information requirements

Babyhood Amani

Good points
- Passes all safety tests
- Converts to junior bed

Bad points
- Very difficult to assemble the dropside
- Fails minor information requirements

Childcare Lullabye XT

Good points
- Passes all safety tests
- Converts to junior bed

Bad points
- Fails minor information requirements

Mother's Choice Melrose

Good points
- Passes all safety tests
- Converts to junior bed

Bad points
- Fails minor information requirements

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		Price ($)	PERFORMANCE: Passed all safety tests	PERFORMANCE: Passed information requirements	FEATURES: Dropside	FEATURES: Teething strips	FEATURES: Castors	FEATURES: Brakes	FEATURES: Junior bed conversion kit	SPECIFICATIONS: Dimensions (cm, H x W x L)*	Contact
RECOMMENDED	# **Babyhood** Amani	599	✓		✓		4	4	✓	146 x 87 x 135	babyhood.com.au
RECOMMENDED	# **Childcare** Lullabye XT (A)	340	✓		✓	✓	4	4	✓(E)	114 x 78 x 136	cnpbrands.com.au
RECOMMENDED	# **Love N Care** Regal	799			✓		0	0	✓	111 x 85 x 158	lovencare.com.au
RECOMMENDED	**Love N Care** Sereno	229	✓		✓		4	4		105 x 76 x 141	lovencare.com.au
RECOMMENDED	# **Mother's Choice** Melrose	400	✓				0	0	✓	105 x 78 x 141	www.igcdorel.com.au
RECOMMENDED	# **Nature's Purest** 91550	1200	✓	✓			0	0	✓	101 x 79 x 147	cnpbrands.com.au
RECOMMENDED	# **Regent** Ascot	399	✓		✓		0	0	✓	113 x 76 x 135	(03) 9580 0619
RECOMMENDED	**Regent** Sherbrooke	399	✓		✓		0	0	✓	113 x 76 x 135	(03) 9580 0619
RECOMMENDED	**Tasman Eco** Capri	379	✓		✓		0	0	✓(E)	105 x 89 x 136	tasmaneco.com.au
RECOMMENDED	# **Tasman Eco** Modena	599	✓		✓		0	0	✓(E)	105 x 86 x 152	tasmaneco.com.au
RECOMMENDED	**Tasman Eco** Tuscany	699	✓		✓		0	0	✓(E)	106 x 86 x 146	tasmaneco.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	**Babyhood** Luna V2	399			✓	✓	4	4	✓(F)	116 x 76 x 135	babyhood.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	**Boori** Madison 3 in 1	800			✓	(C)	0	0	✓(F)	103 x 88 x 142	boori.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	**Boori** Matilda	630			✓		0	0	✓	102 x 86 x 140	boori.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	# **Boori** Pioneer	600			✓		0	0	✓	98 x 87 x 143	boori.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	**Grotime** C48 Ritz	349			✓	✓	4	4	✓	117 x 76 x 140	grotime.net
WORTH CONSIDERING	**Ikea** Gulliver	249				(D)	0	0	✓	83 x 75 x 137	ikea.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	# **Ikea** Hensvik	199					0	0	✓	87 x 75 x 137	ikea.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING	# **Leander** Walnut	1679					0	0	✓	95 x 70 x 121	danishbydesign.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED	**Babyhood** Georgia Sleigh	549			✓	✓	4	4		108 x 77 x 153	babyhood.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED	**Cariboo** Contemporary Q03	799					0	0	✓(E)	92 x 82 x 139	cariboonz.com
NOT RECOMMENDED	# **Cheekybub** Scallywag (A)	299			✓		0	0	✓(E)	102 x 85 x 136	tasmaneco.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED	**Grotime** C49 Harriet (B)	489			✓	✓	4	4	✓(F)	112 x 82 x 140	grotime.net
NOT RECOMMENDED	**Ikea** Sniglar	129					0	0	✓	84 x 75 x 138	ikea.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED	# **Mothercare** Summer Oak	479					0	0	✓	94 x 78 x 147	mothercare.com.au

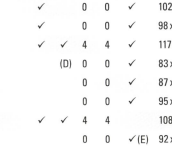
For more about cots, including how we test and what to look for, visit **choice.com.au/cots**

USING THE TABLE
Recommended Meets all safety requirements, but may fail some very minor information requirements. **Worth considering** Meets all key safety requirements, but fails some minor points (such as finger entrapment). **Not recommended** Fails at least one major safety requirement. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2012. **TABLE NOTES #** Newly tested model. * Rounded up to the nearest cm. **(A)** Discontinued, but some stock may be available. **(B)** Model discontinued and replaced with the Harriet 10, which the manufacturer says rectifies all problems found in our test. However, the C49 may still be found in some stores. **(C)** Replaceable timber top rail. **(D)** Optional extra. **(E)** The junior bed conversion kit is available as an optional extra. **(F)** No bed rail used.

Nature's Purest 91550

Good points
- Passes all safety tests
- Converts to junior bed

Bad points
- Expensive



Regent Ascot

Good points
- Passes all safety tests
- Converts to junior bed

Bad points
- Fails minor information requirements

Tasman Eco Modena

Good points
- Passes all safety tests
- Converts to junior bed and lounge (parts sold separately)

Bad points
- Fails minor information requirements

Nutshell

➤ We test 12 strollers to the latest version of the Australian standard, AS/NZS 2088:2009.

➤ Most manufacturers are yet to move to the new version of the standard, testing instead to the year 2000 version or only to the mandatory requirements (also based on the older version).

On a roll

We've updated our stroller testing to the latest version of the Australian standard, but few manufacturers seem to be doing likewise, says **Chris Barnes**

Strollers sold in Australia must meet certain safety requirements based on the Australian standard, AS/NZS 2088. Most manufacturers have their strollers certified to the year 2000 version of this standard – however, it was revised in 2009. The revised version takes account of emerging trends in stroller design and includes some new voluntary safety requirements that address recently identified hazards.

As yet, few manufacturers have moved to the 2009 version. However, we think it's time to make the move, so for this test and in future, our recommendations are based only on the latest standard. For this reason, the table (right) doesn't include any models from previous tests, though many are still available.

For full details of this test, including how we test, go to **choice.com.au/strollers**

Several models here and in previous tests don't pass the 2009 standard. Many fail a newly included test that checks that loops formed by the harness straps aren't a strangulation hazard when buckled together. It can be dangerous for a child to slip through such a loop and get caught, as was confirmed by a tragic fatality in 2005. Children are most at risk from this hazard when left unattended or when the harness is left buckled when not in use, so you can reduce the risk with practical steps. Nevertheless, there's no need for this problem to exist.

You shouldn't stop using strollers that we've previously recommended based on the older standard. But the new standard improves on safety, and we hope by basing our recommendations on this version, we'll encourage the industry to do likewise.

CALL US TODAY **choice** SHOPPER 1300 360 655

	Price ($)	PERFORMANCE: Passes all key safety tests	Passes all durability tests	Ease of use
RECOMMENDED				
Bertini I-Ride Silver	399	✓	✓	70
Steelcraft Agile	399	✓	✓	70
NOT RECOMMENDED				
Bugaboo Donkey (Mono)	1649		✓	70
Mother's Choice Vivea	250		✓	70
Maxi-Cosi Mila	399		✓	70
Childcare Discovery	290		✓	65
Maclaren Globetrotter	250		✓	65
Quinny Senzz	499		✓	65
Stokke Xplory	1699		✓	65
Phil & Teds Classic	500		✓	60
BebeCare Mira	150			65
Capella Cony	349			65

USING THE TABLE Safety and durability tests A stroller can only pass unloading the basket, using the swivel wheel lock, applying and releasing th (including fitting into a car boot) (25%). **Price** Recommended retail, as of up to the next cm. **(A)** Suitable from birth with optional baby carrier. **(B)**

WHAT TO BUY

These models pass our key safety and durability tests

Bertini I-Ride, $399

Good points

- Easy to use
- Adjustable handle height
- Rain and leg (boot) covers included
- Adapters included for Maxi-Cosi infant carrier (infant car capsule)

Bad points

- No tyre pump included for pneumatic tyres

Steelcraft Agile, $399

Good points

- Easy to use
- Rain cover included
- Adapters included for Steelcraft infant carrier (infant car capsules)

Bad points

- None to mention

TURES			SPECIFICATIONS								
Suitable for newborn	Front bar		Number of wheels	Rear brakes	Backrest recline / seat tilt positions	Maximum recommended weight of child (kg)	Bottom basket capacity (kg)	Stroller weight (kg)*	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**	Contact
✓	✓		4	Linked	3	23	4	14.9	111 x 61 x 104	igcdorel.com.au
✓			4	Linked	(B)	17	4	8.9	104 x 60 x 93	britax.com.au
✓	✓		4	Linked	(C)	17	10	16.1	113 x 61 x 107	bugaboo.com
✓	✓		3	Linked	3	20	4	10.5	104 x 64 x 103	igcdorel.com.au
✓			4	Linked	(B)	17	2	8.9	105 x 53 x 88	igcdorel.com.au
✓	✓		4	Linked	4	17	3	12.2	106 x 55 x 89	cnpbrands.com.au
			4	Linked	(B)	20	2	5.7	104 x 48 x 81	cnpbrands.com.au
(A)			4	Linked	3	15	5	9.9	104 x 63 x 84	igcdorel.com.au
(A)	✓		4	Linked	(C)	20.5	2	13.6	119 x 57 x 112	exquira.com.au
✓	✓		3	Linked	2	20	3	12.7	113 x 61 x 108	philandteds.com
✓			4	Individual	4	17	3	7.9	104 x 48 x 85	cnpbrands.com.au
✓	✓		4	Individual	3	18	5	7.0	104 x 50 x 89	lovencare.com.au

fail these tests. **Ease of use score** This is made up of various adjustments – safety harness, seat recline and so on (25%); loading and akes (25%); manoeuvring through doors, up and down stairs, turning a tight corner, over rough terrain (25%); unfolding, folding and carrying bruary 2012. **TABLE NOTES** * Including supplied accessories, rounded to the nearest 0.1kg. ** Maximum dimensions when in use, rounded riable, which means there are no fixed notches. **(C)** Tilting seat.

ABOUT THE REST

Several strollers fail the harness loop test mentioned opposite. Some fail other important safety tests such as inadequate head barriers (to prevent a child sliding out the head end when the seat is fully reclined) and frame locking devices that don't require enough force to operate (meaning there's more chance of accidentally folding the stroller). The **BebeCare** and **Capella** both fail durability tests (broken wheel brackets and reverse handle mechanism respectively). For details, see **choice.com.au/strollers**. ■

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Mandatory safety requirements are based on key clauses of the full (voluntary) Australian standard, AS/NZS 2088. Look for certification to the full standard, preferably the latest version AS/NZS 2088:2009.

Wheels Four-wheelers are often more compact. Three-wheelers tend to be larger and heavier but also more manoeuvrable. However, this can make them more likely to roll away if left unattended, and they can also be more prone to tipping. Lockable swivelling front wheels assist with manoeuvring over various terrains.

Brakes Linked foot-operated brakes on both rear wheels mean both sides can be activated by a single action rather than applied individually.

Five-point harness Two shoulder straps, waist straps and a crotch strap. Tug the harness to check the seat doesn't pull away from the frame. Straps should be adjustable to allow for growth.

Check for:

- Protruding parts that can hit your child's head, or detachable small parts that pose a choking risk.
- Gaps that could trap fingers.
- Sharp edges or points.
- Two-stage frame locking mechanism that's easy to use (for you, not a child).
- Stability – sideways and rearward.

Notice of General Meeting
IN MELBOURNE
of the Australian Consumers Association ACN 000 281 925
on Thursday 24 May 2012
Consumer Forum will be held 2.30pm-4.30pm
General Meeting will be held 5pm-6pm
For information about the venue and to confirm your attendance, visit choice.com.au/GM2012

choice

Please RSVP by Wednesday 16 May 2012

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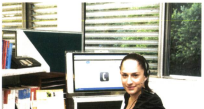

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A LATE SCRATCHING

Does this sponge scratch or not? Depends whether you read the front or side of the packet.

Hard Word

Ingredients: Full cream milk*, raw sugar*, coffee granules* (min 0.6%), xanthan gum, pectin, vanilla*.
*Certified biodynamic or organic

Milking it

Overeager to spruik its health claims, the makers of this café latte drink claim it's both 98% fat-free and made with full-cream milk.

How can a radio sound this good? Quality speaker and large tuning dial is the secret!

Sound reasoning?

The secret of great sound quality – a large tuning dial? CHOICE's radio experts think not.

Do your kids need a challenge?

Some square balls should keep them busy for hours.

4 pack

$6

Aerial 4 pack of 4 square balls

THEY LOOK TASTY....

... and if we're to believe the packaging, these grain-eating pies from Aldi are hungry as well!

Thanks this month go to David Pike, Michael Tarttelin and Georgina Fyfe, Larry Lees and Jenny Robinson. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

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